

SANE LUNACY: AN EVALUATION OF
JOSEPH HELLER'S **CATCH-22** AND
THE CRITICAL REACTION TO IT

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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JOSEPH HELLER'S CATCH-22 AND
THE CRITICAL REACTION TO IT**

by



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requirements for the degree of Master
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ABSTRACT

The critical reaction which greeted the publication of Joseph Heller's Catch-22 in 1961, and which continues to the present, suggests that Heller's novel moves, in terms of both style and tone, toward a method and a sensibility which are strikingly different from what the contemporary sensibility deems acceptable. A somewhat less than enthusiastic welcome from academic circles raises interesting questions concerning the direction of modern criticism.

A consideration of Heller's other works prepares a background against which to view the achievement of Catch-22 and to evaluate the critical reaction to the novel. A further consideration, within the limited context of the war novel sub-genre to which it peripherally belongs, enables one to discover Heller's ultimate area of concern--the contemporary human condition.

Heller's stylistic method is directly related to the tone of the novel and the sensibility which it embodies. In short, the absurdist techniques which the novel employs become a mirror image of a world gone mad. The result is that Catch-22 challenges the reader to re-evaluate certain traditional notions of what novels are and what the nature

of society is. It is because the critics have, for the most part, refused to accept this challenge that their conclusions about the novel are inadequate.

This thesis has been examined and approved by

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CHAPTER I

MISCELLANEOUS PUBLICATIONS

i. "There was only one catch...."

Events of powerful human significance seldom pass without passionate comment from the community of artists who live during their unfolding or their aftermath. It is also not uncommon for these comments to embody much more than the immediate and, as is the nature of art, to assume a more universal significance which lingers long after the events themselves have receded into the annals of history. At the end of one such comment on the Second World War James Jones wrote: "One day one of their number would write a book about all this; but none of them would believe it..."¹ The book, of which Jones unknowingly spoke, was published in the fall of 1961. It was written by Joseph Heller and was entitled Catch-22.

In what appeared to be a determined effort to prove Jones correct, a multitude of critics launched an attack on the novel which to date, more than ten years later, shows little signs of subsiding. Perhaps no novel

¹The Thin Red Line (1964), p. 445.

written in America in the decades following the war, has caused such a critical furor. And, indeed, it may be necessary to go outside both America and the war to Joyce's Ulysses to find a parallel. This, in itself, may be of more significance than is immediately apparent. An evaluation of the novel in the light of this criticism leads one to conclude that Heller, like so many other contemporary writers, has ventured into areas unacceptable to contemporary criticism and the sensibility which such criticism fosters.

The adverse reaction to the novel took two forms. Among the critics were those who cloaked their attack upon the novel under a veneer of critical jargon and literary traditions ineptly defined and improperly applied--criticism as camouflage. Others attempted to condemn the novel on literary grounds by the application of a carefully constructed body of non-literary prejudices--camouflage as criticism. In both cases the conclusions drawn became classic non sequiturs.

Those critics in the former category, while they disagreed in practically every particular instance, were agreed on one point--the book was not a novel. It was, they claimed, a feeble attempt at writing a novel which had not succeeded; no more than a gimmick, which gasped

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"for want of craft and sensibility,"² which had been forced upon an unsuspecting readership by over-zealous publicity agents. Evelyn Waugh was moved to join forces with this group and pronounced the novel to be suffering "not only from indelicacy but from prolixity."³

The members of the second group did not concern themselves with fine points of style and structure; they directed their attack on the novel from the fortress of righteousness. Here was a book which scoffed at man's nobility and heroism and wallowed in the portrayal of his ignobility.⁴ These critics were continuously reminding their readers that a writer who defiled and defamed humanity could not be called an artist.

It took a reviewer for a slick magazine to compile a list of the novel's "literary" shortcomings and an academic to compile a catalogue of the book's "nasty" qualities. Whitney Balliett lamented the fact that Heller had failed not only to write a novel but even to write a book. Catch-22 had not been written; it had been "shouted

²Quoted in Nelson Algren, "Catch-22: A Happy Reappraisal," Chicago Daily News, June 25, 1961.

³In a letter to Heller's agent, dated 6 September 1961, Brandeis University Collection.

⁴"Battle and the Bomb," TLS, June 15, 1962.

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onto paper." He went on to accuse Heller of presenting a montage of borrowed material which resulted only in "a debris of sour jokes, stage anger, dirty words, synthetic looniness, and the sort of antic behaviour that children fall into when they know they are losing our attention."⁵ Douglas Day, while he attempted to disassociate himself from the views he expressed, declared that "seen through the eyes of a patriot like, say, Lieutenant Colonel John Glenn, it would appear to be a sort of perverted Boy Scout's Oath of a novel: it is untrustworthy, disloyal, unhelpful, unfriendly, discourteous, unkind, cheerless, unthrifty, craven, unclean, and irreverent."⁶

Thus it seemed that while the factions were not in agreement on the reasons for their initial conclusions, there was a striking similarity among the tentative conclusions reached: Catch-22 was not literature, not a novel, nor worth serious attention, and not very nice. In retrospect it is interesting to note how many of these critical pronouncements were made at a time when the Simon and Schuster hard-bound edition (1961)⁷ seemed doomed to financial

⁵New Yorker, (December 7, 1961), p. 247.

⁶"Catch-22: A Manifesto for Anarchists," Carolina Quarterly, (Summer, 1963), p. 86.

⁷All references are to this edition.

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failure.⁸ A suggested relationship between financial success and literary worth is implied in many of these early comments on the novel. Since that time the Dell paper-bound edition (1962) has sold over three million copies and the novel has been translated into more than a dozen languages. The novel has been turned into a rather disastrous motion picture which has had an excellent run at the box office. It is not uncommon to see some of the early righteous hurriedly recasting their initial remarks in the light of these developments.

The book had its defenders. Unfortunately, not unlike some of the characters in the novel, they were more of a liability as allies than they would have been had they been declared enemies. Such was the case with Maurice Dobier who described Catch-22 as "a wild, moving, shocking, hilarious, raging, exhilarating, giant roller-coaster of a book."⁸ There was a small group of critics who, from the beginning, adopted a Yossarian-like stance in defense of the novel. Nelson Algren called it "the greatest American novel to come out of anywhere in years,"⁹ and Philip Toynbee described it as "the greatest satirical work in English since Brewhen."¹⁰ Yet, in large measure,

⁸The New York Herald Tribune, October 10, 1961.

⁹"The Catch," Nation, (November 4, 1961), p. 358.

¹⁰"Here's Greatness--In Satire," The Observer Weekend Review, June 17, 1962.

their claims for the novel went unheeded. And this is significant. Both sides in the dispute singled out the same qualities in the novel; one side used these qualities to condemn the book, the other side used them to praise it. To side with the second group was to understand the import of the old Quaker saying: "All the world is queer save me and thee, and sometimes I wonder about thee."

Heller, it seemed, had touched on a sensitive issue. To define the novel--as novel, as non-novel, as a masterpiece, as a mockery--demanded more than the critic's storehouse of tools or the moralist's offended sense of propriety. What became the central issue in the dispute was a frame of mind, a logic, which pervades the novel; the logic of catch-22 and its ramifications. If I might borrow a line from Robert Frost: "[Catch-22] within itself divides, to trouble us with having to take sides." That was the real catch in Catch-22.

ii. Joseph Heller

"Who is this guy Heller and when is he going to write another one?"¹¹ In 1961 Thomas Pynchon was not the only person wondering who "this guy Heller" was. Up to the

¹¹ Thomas Pynchon, in a letter to Heller's agent, dated 12 November 1961, Brandeis University Collection.

time that Catch-22 appeared there was little reason to suspect Heller of greatness. In 1945, while still in the armed forces, Heller had published a short story. Half a dozen others appeared between that time and the publication of the first chapter of Catch-22 in New World Writing in 1955. Heller was a promising young writer but far from being a major force in literary circles.

Joseph Heller was born in 1923 in the Coney Island district of Brooklyn to Jewish immigrants from Poland and Russia. He was the youngest in a family of three whose father died before he was seven. "The mother kept the home together and Heller has drawn a picture from his childhood in the short story, "Castle of Snow," which describes an industrious mild-eyed woman at her sewing machine and iron, and an uncle who brings shame to the family by burying himself in books and building snow castles."¹² Heller has said that "Coney Island is beautiful to children and ugly to adults, and, in this respect, it is often typical of life itself."¹³

During his stay in this beautiful child's world he attended the Brooklyn public schools where he made

¹² Ingrid Arvidsson, "Yossarian in Manhattan," Manuscript, Brandeis University Collection.

¹³ "Coney Island: The Fun is Over," Show, (July 1962), p. 50.

excellent grades in English and Arithmetic. "The latter offered the same challenge to him as mystery stories, which he likes."¹⁴ He involved himself in a full list of boyhood occupations from selling ice cream to delivering papers and telegrams. Later, because money was not available for college, he ended up as a riveter in a Brooklyn shipyard. It has been suggested that many of the characters and events in Catch-22 are recollections of these early years.

From ten to nineteen years of age, Heller was a member of a neighborhood club, ALTEO (All Loyal to Each Other), whose members include Daniel Rosoff, Samuel Rolfe (producer-creator of The Man from U.N.C.L.E.), Harold J. Bloom (a television and motion picture writer), and novelist George Mandel. Heller was the youngest of the group who still refer to themselves as 'the Coney Island Renaissance'.¹⁵

Heller was nineteen when World War II broke out and the poor boy from Brooklyn spent two years and eleven months with the Twelfth Air Force as a bombardier, flew sixty missions and made the rank of Lieutenant. He liked most of it. He did not see any of his friends die, and it was not until his plane was badly hit on a mission over Avignon and the pilot severely wounded that Heller, like

¹⁴"Closeups on Three Writers," Writers Yearbook, (1963), p. 48.

¹⁵Richard Lehan and Jerry Patch, "Catch-22: The Making of a Novel," Minnesota Review, 7 (1967), p. 240.

Yossarian, realized that everyone was trying to kill him and spent the remainder of the war trying to stay alive. On a visit to Europe in 1967 Heller recalled many of the places and events which shape Catch-22.¹⁶

When he returned from the war he found that he did not have the "magic formula" for writing which he had thought he possessed. The editors of the slick magazines were not very interested in his short stories. Not long after his return from the war he married. With "nothing else to do" he enrolled at the University of Southern California on the G.I. Bill and transferred after a year on a scholarship to New York University where he graduated with honors in 1948. From there he progressed to Columbia University to complete a master's degree. His thesis was on the Pulitzer Prize Plays. Then a Fulbright Grant enabled him to study at Oxford for a year.

Upon returning from England in 1950 he went to Pennsylvania State University as an instructor in English. He found teaching others to write very distasteful. "Writing's too intimate a thing. I always felt I was interfering; it's like prying into someone's sex life."¹⁷

¹⁶"Catch-22 Revisited," Holiday, (April 1967), pp. 44-66ff.

¹⁷"Closeups on Three Writers," p. 49.

In 1952 he returned to New York where, over the next eight years, he held a series of jobs in advertising promotion, until eventually he ended up in the promotion department of McCall's Magazine. "It was during this period that he began his seven year stint, writing Catch-22 in two-hour sessions, nearly every night, for five nights a week."¹⁸

Since the publication of Catch-22 Joseph Heller's biography can easily be traced. The novel grossed enough money to allow him to live as a "professional writer" and he now rates a separate entry in standard bibliographies on modern American literature. Two points come to mind by way of concluding this brief sketch. They may help to give some insight into the man behind Catch-22. In a letter to Newsweek regarding a reference which had been made to Catch-22 in an article on Claude Eatherly,¹⁹ Heller writes: "I cannot forget a quotation attributed to Philip Toynbee: 'I am convinced that Eatherly is sane; but I am no longer convinced of the sanity of society.' I have no opinions about Eatherly's sanity. But I do share Toynbee's doubts about society."²⁰ On another occasion, when asked what he considered to be the mistake most young American writers make, Heller answered, "Being born in America."²¹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ One of those directly involved in the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

²⁰ Newsweek, (May 14, 1962), p. 6.

²¹ "Closeups on Three Writers," p. 49.

iii. Short Stories

As already noted, the literary reputation--or anti-reputation as some would have it--of Joseph Heller rests mainly on his one published novel, Catch-22. The novel is not, however, the extent of his literary output. There are the stories published before the novel: "I Don't Love You Any More" (1945), "Bookies, Beware!" (1947), "Castle of Snow" (1948), "Girl from Greenwich" (1948), "Nothing to be Done" (1949), "A Man Named Flute" (1948), and "MacAdam's Log" (1959). There are also the publications since the novel, the most significant of which is the play, We Bombed in New Haven.

Perhaps the first impression created by these early short stories is the marked difference between them and Catch-22. Yet some of the characteristics which distinguish Catch-22 can be discovered beneath the surface simplicity. They are not, with the exception of "MacAdam's Log," outstanding short stories; they are adequate. The plots are, for the most part, unimaginative and literal. There is a marked lack of subtlety in the characterization and both the characters and the plots are dated. They have many of the marks of the amateur. Most of them appeared in the "popular" magazines and as such bear all the trappings of "bread and butter" literature. Yet the concern for the outcast and the downtrodden; the sly dig at the system and the worst aspects of the American dream

turned nightmare; the ironic twist and the double entendre which are perfected in Catch-22 are all there in embryonic form.

In "I Don't Love You Any More"²² Heller betrays some of the insight into the nature of war and its effects on human relationships which is developed into a surrealistic vision in Catch-22. No doubt, even at that early date, the brew was fermenting but the times--and perhaps Heller himself--were not ready for the final draught.

The story concerns the attempt made by a returning "war hero" to revert to the "normal" life. His wife prefers to consider his patriotic absence as a phase to be skipped over lightly or used to supply a backdrop for anecdotes to regale their friends. Both have changed: she by the passage of time and he by the passage of an era which a war marks. He finds it difficult to come to terms with the renewed relationship. The old security and peace of mind have gone. He is continually aware of reversals which he is unable to explain--especially to his wife.

He had been thinking about her for ten months, thinking about how nice it was (going to be when he got back to her, and how he was back and it wasn't nice at all. (40)

²² Story Magazine, (September-October, 1945), pp. 40-

He finds the "good life" difficult to accept because he knows more now than the good life allows. The gulf which time and war have created makes it impossible for his wife to share his misgivings.

"I'm your wife, not a servant. What did you marry me for? It would have been cheaper to hire a maid."

"I know," he said. "I married you because it was part of the dream."

"It hasn't been easy for me," she said and asked, "What dream?"

"The sugar and tinsel dream of life," he said smirking. He didn't want to smirk but he left the expression unchanged. "The Reader's Digest beautiful panorama of a beautiful life. You were a pretty girl, I was a good-looking boy; we are both just a trifle oversexed, so we got married. It was the thing to do wasn't it?" (41)

Heller makes his point here, but with much too conscious an effort. Heller has not yet mastered the technique of using language to illustrate the inability of language to communicate. Catch-22 abounds with masterful examples of this; Clevinger's trial is a ready example. Here he uses a simple, literal approach with the unfortunate result that the point being made is reduced to the simplistic.

Heller's attempt to incorporate the symbolic--in the form of a Chinese puzzle--is also too blatant. The husband finds it difficult to see divorce as an answer. His attitude concerning divorce is not related to any easily explained motive but is more a question of his not knowing exactly what he wants or why he should want it.

Should he try to regain the past or redeem the future?

He is not sure.

He fingered the Chinese puzzle in his hands unconsciously, two metal rings, and without being aware of it, he deliberately thwarted himself each time from separating them. (40)

The husband refuses to play the social game. He refuses to dress beyond a pair of briefs when it is announced that their best friends are about to visit to be regaled with his comments on war and to admire his shiny uniform with all those medals. Heller betrays his lack of stylistic control by expressing it thus: 'He was lying on the davenport completely naked except for a pair of shorts he was wearing...'²³ Even their different preferences in music come between them until finally he blurts out: 'I don't love you any more.'

But even here Heller is able, for a time at least, to save the story from becoming an Erich Segal forerunner. The wife asks if he wants a divorce but the husband quietly says no. He has grown used to the life and has become 'psychologically dependent' he says.

"Good God," she exclaimed in desperation.

"Then what do you want?" ...

"A pitcher of beer," he said. (42)

The possibilities offered by the humor are not sustained, however. She runs home to mother and as she leaves the house and slams the door the "symbol" returns.

²³The italics are mine.

"Damn!" he said explosively. He heard a slight click and he looked down at his hands. The rings of the puzzle had come apart. (43)

She is gone when the best friends arrive. He is sagely advised, 'Use your head whatever you decide to do.' But there is no opportunity for him to do anything. Before the best friends can leave she returns--not only to apologize but bringing the pitcher of beer. Everyone, presumably, lives happily ever after. Mercifully, we are not subjected to a reconnecting of the Chinese puzzle.

"Bookies, Beware!"²⁴ is a light-hearted look at horse racing and betting. The story concerns one Marvin B. Winkler, student, who discovers by way of a very unique invention--the andlocosmicneutrophile--a way, a 'scientific way,' to beat the odds. On a given day Winkler installs himself at the Santa Anita race track and begins his preparations. He selects his favorite--the darkest of dark horses.

Word quickly reached the ears of the track authorities, and two Pinkerton detectives were immediately dispatched to the scene, and a call was issued for an expert in atomic energy to ascertain if the activities of the young student represented a menace. Nothing came of this, as all the scientists in the country possessing knowledge of atomic energy were in Washington at the time, appearing before congressional committees. (98)

²⁴ Esquire, (May 1947), p. 98.

Here one notices immediately the restraint which Heller maintains. The desired effect is achieved by saying little but hinting at much. He continues to manifest this restraint and in doing so is able to take the comedy beyond the obvious to the point of satire. Undaunted by the commotion he is causing, Winkler proceeds with his calculations and places his bet on "Oatburner" -- the last choice in the field.

News of the student's choice spread throughout the track, and he was at once dismissed as an erratic clodpate. When this information reached the paddock, the jockey of Oatburner, who, it is rumored, had placed a sizable wager on another horse in the race, died laughing and had to be replaced. The horse's owner guffawed heartily and filed a mental memo to pluck his son out of college at once. Even the horse, it is reported on reliable authority, repressed a chuckle. (98)

Needless to say, Oatburner wins. The rest is left to the reader--and the bookies.

"Castle of Snow,"²⁵ is a story set in the Depression. It concerns a Jewish family of three--Uncle David, Aunt Sarah, and a nephew, Bobby. David is 'a sober man' and in many ways earthy and practical like his wife. But he has one weakness--his love of books. He is fond of repeating that 'There is knowledge here in these books and knowledge is a very great thing.' Sarah, on the other hand, cannot understand this in her husband. 'How can you

²⁵ Atlantic, (March 1948), pp. 52-55.

waste so much time with your books,' she demands.

Here again Heller shows restraint in setting the atmosphere for a clash between these two characters which is totally predictable and yet transcends the confines of their individual lives. They do not, perhaps, come alive and remain with the reader as memorable. But as embodiments of polar concepts they are finely drawn. One of the great tragedies of David's life has been the failure of the revolution in Russia. For Sarah, politics do not extend beyond haggling in the market.

Bobby 'was attending elementary school then, and ... was just barely able to understand the implacable laws of economics and the harsh punishments of poverty.' But he is not an impartial observer and is apt to learn. One day David and Bobby witness an eviction. To the boy's uneasy questions David replies: 'It's terrible for someone to be put out on the street. And it's terrible and frightening to be unable to help.'

Life for the small family continues to head precariously toward financial disaster. David loses his job and spends many weeks searching for another and when at last he finds one it proves to be only temporary. He continues to search each day. Sarah takes in laundry, but it is not enough and they are forced to sell some of their

furniture. As a final measure David decides to sell his books. The buyer arrives and each book is examined carefully and handed over until he has withheld only two.

Then with reluctance, he handed one of them to the man and rose. It is interesting to note that in this, possibly the moment of his greatest tragedy, he chose the humor of Chaucer in preference to the comforting promise of the Bible. (54)

Not long thereafter David finds what seems to be an excellent job. But when Bobby returns home from school in the evening he finds his uncle building snow castles in the street with the neighborhood children. The child is confused and runs to his aunt with news of the strange spectacle. And in a scene that is charged with pathos, yet kept painfully real, Heller evokes, amid the squalor of Depression America, an Orwellian vision of the golden country that carries this simple story into the realm of myth.

"David," my Aunt said. "Come upstairs." He saw us and his face broke into a welcoming smile. "Sarah!" he exclaimed with delight. "I was just thinking that maybe I should go upstairs and call you. Come, Sarah, come play in the snow." "Come upstairs," my Aunt said firmly.

He looked at her with surprise. The boys, sensing a conflict, had stopped playing and were drawing slowly away. All the noises in the world ceased suddenly as the whole universe focused eyes upon us.

My uncle's hands played unconsciously with a snowball as he looked up at her. "Forget your housework for a while, Sarah, and come play. It will be like old times again. Do you remember when we used to play in the snow years ago?"

"David." Her voice was low and determined. "Come upstairs."

"Do you remember the time when we went into the country and found the old farmhouse? It was snowing then, and there were you and I and a girl named Sonya, and Peter Grusov. I built a castle for you from the snow. You were fifteen years old then. I built this fine castle for you and you helped me. Then we all went into the woods to look for rabbits, and when we came back it was late and the castle was frozen solid, and we all said it would last forever. It was too late to go back that night and we stayed in the old farmhouse, and when we went out the next morning, the sun was shining and it was warm, and the castle I built you from the snow had melted and couldn't be recognized. Do you remember, Sarah? Try to remember."

"Come upstairs."

"And when we got back that day and you told your father, he chased me with a stick, and I hid in my cellar and he wanted to fight with my father. Try to remember, Sarah. Please try to remember."

"David. Come upstairs."

The calm on my Uncle's face disappeared, and he looked strained and anxious. "All right," he said. "I'll come upstairs. But first tell me if you remember. Think back and try. Do you remember?" He watched her with desperate hope. When she spoke, his face fell.

"Come upstairs," she said. (54-55)

David has not taken the job. The workers were striking and the company had wanted to hire "scabs". "They were men like myself. I couldn't go in and take their jobs." Sarah can understand this. But she is unable to understand why 'a grown man should want to act like a child.'

"Girl from Greenwich"²⁶ reads like a precis of Truman Capote's Breakfast at Tiffany's. Duke (Arthur Clarke)

²⁶ Esquire, (June 1948), pp. 40-41, 142-43.

meets pretty Arlene Edwards, the girl from Greenwich (Connecticut), at a posh literary party in New York. She is a "promising" young writer of bad novels who is about to become famous. Her first novel, details of which we are spared, is due in a few days. It has already been selected by a book of the month club. Her dream has come true.

"... Mr. Cooper [her publisher and Clarke's] gave me a gorgeous suite at a hotel and when my book comes out and I have money I'm going to live there all the time and go to parties every day and be the happiest person in the world." (142)

Duke knows the game; he has heard it all before. He does not like it, but it's a living. He possesses a redeeming cynicism which should make it possible for him to get out, but, like so many other inhabitants of the ledges, he cannot act. He introduces himself to Miss Edwards. 'It's a wonderful party isn't it?' she comments. 'Yes,' he says, 'Let's leave it.' But the best he can offer as an alternative is a visit to a night club. He is diverted from his usual attitude to these parties. ('They occupy the same level of monotony from start to finish'). Miss Edwards presents a refreshing contrast-- which is not a contrast at all because behind the whole facade are thousands of mentalities and talents like Arlene Edwards. They are the fuel which keeps the machine running.

"Is she any good?"

"She'll sell a hundred thousand copies in three months."

"That's not what I asked," Duke said. "Is she any good?"

"No," Cooper said evenly. "It will sell, but it isn't any good." (40)

The party is interrupted by a man in a trench coat who is looking for Arlene. She reluctantly grants him an audience in an ante-room and when Duke comes to rescue her with a story about being wanted on the telephone (not a very original lie) she and the mysterious stranger are engaged in a heated argument. She dismisses him but refuses to apologize for him or discuss him any more and accepts Duke's invitation to the night club. Before they leave she wonders about the protocol which gives Duke another opportunity to play the cynic.

"Is it all right to leave a party so early?"

"Usually it's wrong to come at all." (142)

But the man in the trench coat follows. Duke assails him and reduces him to tears, a turn of events for which neither Duke nor the reader is prepared. Duke demands an explanation and gets more than he would have preferred.

"All right. I suppose you have a right to know."

"I think so. First, I'd like to know how you got tangled up with a character like that in three days."

"It isn't three days," she explained. "I know him from home. He lives in Greenwich."

"Go on."

"And he's not the kind of person you probably think he is. He's a respectable shoe salesman."

"Don't tell me he followed you here to collect a bill."

"Don't be silly," she said, pressing his arm as she laughed. "He's my husband." ...

"He wants me to go back to him," she continued. "To live in Greenwich. Can you imagine that?" (142)

This little revelation is too much for Duke. He has been beaten at his own game. He leaves her in disgust, advising her to 'Go back to the party and drink some more martinis.'

"Nothing to be Done"²⁷ is Heller's story, about "The Syndicate." Carl, 'a fat little man in his late forties,' runs a pool room which is a front for a bet collecting depot. On a given day Nat, one of the boys who works for him, misplaces a bet, a bet belonging to Nick London. The name alone strikes fear in the hearts of the initiated. Both Carl and Huck, Carl's other employee, know that Nat is a good boy and honest. But that is not the point. Twelve hundred dollars is due on the one hundred dollar bet and London will demand his pound of flesh...

"What's going to happen?" Huck asked.

Carl looked out the window at the building across the street and at the small portion of sky that he could see without moving. "It's going to rain," he said. "It's going to rain like hell." (73)

Again Heller achieves something more than the prosaic plot suggests by avoiding the inevitable comment on the

²⁷Esquire, (August 1948), pp. 73, 129-30.

obvious. The impact is sustained and the story does not become just another about "hit men" and "bad guys." They do appear, but, as in a Greek tragedy, Heller allows most of the unpleasant physical action to happen off stage. Carl and Huck wait silently in an upper room while the "hit men" administer their lesson and appear only after the car has pulled away. At the end we learn that all of this has been secondary. The impact of the story rests in the mind of Carl. When the silence returns and he is alone he takes an envelope from its hiding place under the rug.

He had found it buried in his pocket the night before. Somehow it had got separated from the other bets Nat had given him, and when he had discovered it, it was already too late. He had been thinking about it all night and all morning, trying to figure out if there was anything that could be done and realizing all the time that there wasn't. Twelve hundred dollars was due, and someone had to pay for the mistake. It was best the way it happened, he kept telling himself, because he was a soft, middle-aged man, and Nat was young and in good health. He felt very sad about it, because Nat was a good, honest kid, and Carl liked him a lot.

Standing by the door, he opened the envelope and looked at the money inside. It contained a hundred dollars, and Carl stared at it for a moment deliberating. Then he walked slowly into the bathroom and tore it up, money and all. He watched the pieces carefully as they fell into the bowl, but when he came back into the other room he felt no better. He unlatched the door and went downstairs. (130)

Meanwhile, in another pool room and at another time, we find "A Man Named Flute."²⁸ Dave Murdock is a book maker of standing, who has a good arrangement with the local police, and who is doing a flourishing business. On a given day the sergeant informs Dave that 'we have to close you up for a while.' Murdock is not alarmed. He simply collects his papers, gives his home number to the favored customers, arranges to have someone arrested in his stead, and goes home to supper.

His wife is not pleased at the news of this latest "closure." But Murdock has become accustomed to her position by now.

He had been a bookmaker for almost fifteen years, and in all that time Claire had never stopped disapproving. With an almost puritanical obstinacy, she still refused to regard his income as an honest living. (67)

But Murdock has an answer which satisfies him, if not his wife. It is the nature of business.

"Look, Claire," he said, with a slight trace of annoyance. "Stop blaming all the gambling in the world on me. The city is crawling with bookmakers, if I didn't take the bets I handle, someone else would. Can't you see that?" (67)

But, that very day, Murdock discovers his son on a street-corner with a group of the neighborhood teenagers. They are all smoking "reefers." With a little help from

²⁸ Atlantic, (August 1948), pp. 55-70.

his friends, he discovers that the pusher is a man named Flute. He confronts his son with his new found knowledge but with little success. He proceeds immediately to Marty Bell's pool room with the intention of finding Flute and 'beating his brains out.' But Flute holds him and reduces him to submission 'as though he possessed only the puny power of an infant,' and informs him calmly that 'It's all up to your kid....He comes to me. Tell me who he is and I won't sell it to him.'

Murdock returns home crestfallen and soon receives a visit from Marty Bell on Flute's behalf. Flute just wants to be left alone.

"Why?" Murdock demanded brusquely. "Why should I let him alone?"

"Because he's a good boy, Dave. You don't know him Dave, but he's a good boy."

"Yeah," Murdock said scornfully. "Some good boy. He sells dope to my kid."

Marty shrugged with acute discomfort. "He just looks to make a buck," he explained. "You know how it is, Dave. You knocked around a lot yourself."

"I never sold dope," Murdock said.

"That doesn't mean anything," Marty said, with another deprecating shrug. He stepped close to Murdock and cocked his face forward in an intimate gesture. "He just tries to get by. You know how it is, Dave. There are a dozen guys in the neighborhood who would sell tea to your kid if he wants it. If Flute didn't do it, somebody else would. It's just like your own business." (69-70)

Murdock orders Marty Bell to leave, apologizes to his son and eats his supper in silence--carefully avoiding his wife's eyes throughout.

"MacAdam's Log"²⁹ is the last, and certainly the best, of this group of stories. The story consists of two excellently executed plots, skilfully interwoven, and given life by the appearance of the Captain in each. On the one hand, the Captain lives the real life with his daughter, Cynthia, and his son-in-law, Neil, in their suburban (in the full stereotyped sense of the word) home. On the other hand, he lives the life of his log--the life of his imaginary voyages.

These voyages had begun a number of years before when his sister had sailed back to Scotland to die. 'She did not give that as her purpose, of course, substituting instead some obstinate nonsense about a girl-hood friend now alone and in failing health....' On this occasion the Captain had remained on the pier to watch the ship leave port.

The people about him were soon dispersing, but the Captain stayed on until it was no longer in sight. Across the river, which glistened in places with filthy slicks of oil, the Jersey bluffs were tranquil and clear in the soft daylight. Above them a noiseless flock of clouds dozed like sleeping swans. Slowly it all dissolved, and he could see the open ocean, its vast, blue grandeur rolling calmly and majestically before him into the timeless deep and distance, and it was with this bright vision in mind that he finally turned away.

After that it was only a matter of time before the Captain went to sea. (112)

²⁹The Gentlemen's Quarterly, (December, 1959), pp. 112 and 166-78.

His life becomes a precarious balance between his life in suburbia and his voyages. He accepts his place in the family as he must. He witnesses the quarrels; he tries to help the children; he tries to mediate--but always without wanting to intrude. When life on shore becomes unbearable he escapes on one of his voyages.

While on a visit to the city one day he discovers that the "Washington" is sailing that very noon. He goes immediately to the pier and goes on board. After a brief stay he returns to the dock and watches himself sail on his first voyage.

He was drawn from his bed several days later for one of the powders Dr. Berensen had provided for his gastric attacks and then--that very same morning--learned from the papers that the Washington had been delayed and was tossing in heavy seas outside Southampton.

It had been a miserable crossing--very miserable, indeed, if even the Captain suffered with seasickness. (167)

On one of his voyages he makes the acquaintance of a young ship's officer named Mr. Simpson, who had been going to college when the war broke out but gave it up because 'it seemed so pointless...so out of date. The noise of machines used to fill the library and distract [him].' He takes the Captain on a tour of the engine room and treats him to a glass of brandy in his quarters. This is a great day for the old Captain.

Pressures continue to mount in the household. Cynthia becomes very ill and for some time her life is

feared. She recovers. This incident land-locks the Captain for six weeks. But his imagination is not sullied. In the course of his voyages he has become an authority on many foreign places. One evening in an exchange with Mr. Paterson--an obnoxious but very important client of his son-in-law--the Captain brings shame on the family by maintaining, against Mr. Paterson's vehement claims to the contrary, that the Blue Grotto is in Genoa. Had he not visited it on one of his many voyages? But the Captain is browbeaten into admitting that he may, indeed, be mistaken.

There was not the slightest sound as the Captain walked unsteadily from the room and made his way upstairs, where he sat down limply on the edge of his bed. He was still sitting there when Cynthia entered without knocking. She closed the door carefully and confronted him with a face that was all bone and tight skin.

"You fool!" she exclaimed furiously. "You stupid, stupid fool!"

"But I was right, Cynthia. It is in Genoa."

"I don't care where it is! You and your damn lies about your trips to Europe and your precious Mr. Simpson and his engine room. And tonight of all times! Are you insane?"

"They aren't lies," protested the Captain.

"They are lies! How would you know where anything is? You've only taken one trip in your life and that was on the dirty old steamer that brought you here. A lot of traveling you've done! That's the truth, isn't it?"

"But it is in Genoa, Cynthia. I swear it is."

"Answer me! They are lies, aren't they?"

Her face blazed wildly as she took a menacing step toward him. "Aren't they?"

"Yes," the Captain whispered, and his voice covered a sob. "Yes, they are lies." (174-75)

The Captain prepares for his next voyage secretly. He goes in search of Mr. Simpson only to find that he is in jail. He has been arrested for smuggling. Finally, he is ordered not to board ships unless he is actually sailing. There appears to be nothing left to do but to settle back into the routine of life as it was before his voyages began.

He was normally the earliest in the house to awake, and it was he generally who stepped out to the porch at the beginning of each day and carried the mail inside.... He let a full week go by to allay suspicion, and then one morning delivered his solemn announcement.

"I received a letter," he began in a firm voice, when the entire family had assembled for breakfast. "From my sister in Scotland. She has fallen ill." (178)

As mentioned above, what is interesting here, in relation to Catch-22, is what appears beneath the surface simplicity and amateurish techniques. Catch-22 offends because it is a stinging condemnation of a society in decay; a society which does not admit this decay and which refuses to be reminded of it. It offends because of the totality of its vision. It is an apocalyptic novel. The inhabitants of the wasteland see themselves too readily in its pages. A cathartic or mithridatic surrender to the novel demands more than the subjects of the Fisher King are prepared to render.

It seems to me that the short stories demand the same surrender. But, should these stories be collected

and published in one volume they would not receive it. Nor--and this is central to an assessment of the novel--would they cause any significant stir or elicit attacks similar to the attacks which first greeted the novel. Certainly the excellence which distinguishes the novel is lacking here in large measure. But that is not really the point.

The short stories would be more easily comprehended and more easily digested. They would be more easily accepted as entertainment. Largely this is because the stories contain neither the fullness of vision nor the universality of the novel. They can more easily be considered as something outside the self. Only individuals, individual cases, particular conditions, and isolated concepts are analyzed. The reader can enjoy the role of the spectator, without having to confront or reject what is presented. The novel does not allow this choice. The novel demands the taking of sides.

But the overall impression, the total flavor, one gets from a reading of these stories is something else again. That impression--as is the case with the novel--is one of a decaying society, of those who keep it running, of those who try to contend with it, and of those who attempt to survive in spite of it. Each story describes a society in which the guiding principles are those

perfected by Milo Minderbinder and Colonel Cathcart; a society, in fact, governed by catch-22; a society which is governed by no principle except the one which says that "they" have a right to do anything which "we" can not stop them from doing.

The question, therefore, is one of existence--not just one of survival. It is the same question which pervades the novel. One must either conform, resist, or flee. But this is not as simple, or as simplistic, as it sounds. To conform is to condone. Of this type Arlene Edwards, the "writer", is a prime example. On such people the system feeds; they are the fuel which keeps it running. One can perhaps excuse her and many like her on the grounds that they know not what they do. But Duke knows and does not act on that knowledge. Dave Murdock knows and prospers.

"If you can't beat them, join them," seems to be the fundamental truism in the society described by these stories. There is nothing to be done, as Carl explains it. But there are those, even in the world of the short stories, who refuse to join them. But who wins then? Like Yossarian, David and the Captain re-affirm the role of the innocent. But is this enough? Like Simon, in William Golding's Lord of the Flies, they refuse to make a private peace with the beast. But they meet with no more success

than he does in communicating their truth. Like Yossarian they see beyond the surface gloss. They affirm the potential of the individual--a potential that manifests itself best in the Quixotic stance. David's snow castles and the voyages of the Captain are, above all, a refusal to be controlled by M & M Enterprises; the refusal to want even a share. Winkler beats them at their own game but it is a Pyrrhic victory.

Duke, Arlene Edwards, Aunt Sarah, and Carl are incapable of the Quixotic stance because they lack that "little bit of madness" with which Shakespeare's comic lovers are so familiar and of which Zorba the Greek, in Nikos Kazantzakis' novel of that title speaks so knowingly. The fears expressed by several characters in the novel that Yossarian, "that crazy bastard," may be the only sane one left are expressions of the paradox. The paradox which points to the necessity of becoming a conventional coward--or a fool--in order to remain a moral hero. But the role of the coward or the fool, as Lear so painfully learns, requires a great commitment. It requires a commitment to others which is not possible without a commitment to self.

This is the crux of the moral issue. Private resolutions do not work. Dave Murdock learns that the hard way. There is something of the profundity of Donne's "no man is an island" here. The only way to attempt to

save everyone is to resolve firmly to save oneself, even when this has to be done in spite of everyone else. That perhaps is why so few sympathize with Yossarian's final action. But the Captain has the same knowledge and acts on it.

The options presented--in the stories as well as in the novel--may not be acceptable to those who would like a more workable solution to the problem. But the more workable or mechanical solutions are the less natural and less human they become.³⁰ These options are mainly three: remain and conform--which is to lose; remain and resist--which may come to no more than just that; or, like David, the Captain, and Yossarian, one can adopt the Quixotic stance.

Many refuse to consider the last by branding it as mere escapism. It is seen as the selfish, easy way out. When Yossarian makes up his mind he receives the same arguments. His answers, however, are not easily dismissed.

"This may actually help them," Major Danby persisted stubbornly. "Have you thought of that?"

"Let the bastards thrive, for all I care, since I can't do a thing to stop them but embarrass them by running away. I've got responsibilities of my own now, Danby. I've got to get to Sweden."

"You'll never make it. It's impossible. It's almost a geographical impossibility to get there

³⁰ Henri Bergson's essay on "Laughter" is an excellent evaluation of this point. cf. Comedy, with an introduction and appendix by Wylie Sypher (New York: Anchor Books, 1956).

from here."

"Hell, Danby, I knew that. But at least I'll be trying...."

"It's absolutely insane. Your conscience will never let you rest."

"God bless it." Yossarian laughed. "I wouldn't want to live without strong misgivings...."³¹

The refusal to accept misgivings is the quality that colours the society of the stories and the society which they reflect.

iv. We Bombed in New Haven

In the autumn of 1967 the Yale Drama School--with a little help from their friends in professional acting circles--produced a play by Joseph Heller. It was called We Bombed in New Haven and the critics, taking their cue from the punning title, were off again.

A new security was manifested by those who felt that they would not be proved wrong a second time. Catch-22 had been one thing; this was something else. Heller had shifted ground to the theater and was out of his element. John J. Murray, not realizing that he was taking sides in the war that the play satirizes, unleashed his own bomb.

Therefore, in dissent from the pseudo-sophisticates who will admire this Variations on a Theme by the Team of Curtis LeMay--the Pentagon--Yossarian--and Adolf Hitler, j'accuse

³¹ Joseph Heller, Catch-22 (New York, 1961), p. 441.

Joseph Heller. (I've grown a little more suspicious of gimmicky writing since I flipped uncritically over Catch-22). I deny the dust jacket's claim and that of many other stalwart defenders that "history" has stolen the wild imaginings of Catch-22. In testing this hypothesis, I gave my copy of that "hilarity" to a Vietnam war vet. His reaction was that it was better than Sominex.³²

This, of course, is exactly the reaction Murray should have expected and which, although he denies it, does prove the point of the defenders. He goes on to say that We Bombed in New Haven fails because it is not real, but merely an enchantment of the mind.

But such enchantments of the mind are nothing near as horrible as the real captain of a very real USS Vance who, thinking he was a real Captain Marvel, ordered 200 sandbags for his ship as protection from VC shore snipers, forgetting temporarily Archimedes' principle. This did not happen in the selective mind of an apprentice playwright "trying out" at Yale's school of drama. It happened in the Tonkin Gulf.³³

Logically, Murray's stand is that war is too real to capture in literature and when an attempt is made to do so it should not be treated seriously. In other words, history does steal the "wild imaginings" of the literary imagination. Murray's example defeats his own argument.

Other critics, not wishing to say too much too soon, were more generous. "In a way, Heller belongs to a sad-

³² John J. Murray, "Review," Best Sellers, (September 1, 1968), p. 219.

³³ Ibid.

but honorable tradition. Good novelists from Henry James to Hemingway have often been poor playwrights. In recent years, Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, and James Baldwin have also bombed theatrically, though not in New Haven."³⁴

On the main issue the critics were agreed. It was a bad play, suffering from a multitude of defects too numerous to mention. Nevertheless, the critics could not refrain from mentioning several. Not necessarily, that they were actually there; the critics found it easy to invent them. It saved them from confronting the play. It was in attempting to catalogue the play's defects that the critics betrayed their own total confusion. There was little agreement on the nature of the problem.

Here--as had been the case with the novel--Heller was accused of borrowing heavily, and not well. "Leaning precariously on Pirandello and Brecht for his dramatic hocus and pocus, Heller has written a spoof of the old-fashioned war play or film."³⁵

But what if Heller had intended all of this to be taken seriously? Then it had best be viewed as an attempt--which had not succeeded--to write a "compelling

³⁴"Catchall-22," Time, (December 15, 1967), p. 83.

³⁵Ibid.

black-humor indictment of war."³⁶ He had failed because the play was nothing more than "another protest against war that fights phantoms and ignores common sense."³⁷ Heller was dismissed as a member of the New Left "who believes that everybody who isn't burning draft cards has to be an advocate of more and bloodier wars. [And] starting from that false assumption, the play is inept in practically every element of dramatic writing."³⁸ One critic, at least, saw the play as being anything but a war play and therefore it had failed because it "becomes the kind of anti-war play it has been pretending not to be."³⁹

The common error in all of these statements is the failure on the part of the critics, not Heller, to allow themselves to take the play seriously. The critics, too, are part of the audience and, as Robert Hatch points out, Heller "seems to understand that a playwright's most important creation is the audience, a fragile and ephemeral entity that takes shape in the house from the matrix of what takes place on stage."⁴⁰ Heller compels

³⁶The Christian Century, (August 28, 1968), p. 1082.

³⁷T. Lewis, America, (November 9, 1968), p. 447.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹The Reporter, (January 25, 1968), p. 44.

⁴⁰Robert Hatch, "Review," The Nation, (November 4, 1968), p. 477.

the audience to confront the play as he has the actors confront the roles they are playing. This in turn has the result of compelling the audience, individually, and as a group, to re-evaluate the roles they are playing as well.

We Bombed in New Haven is a play in two acts, which covers one hundred and ninety-six pages in the Knopf edition, and has not less than fourteen and not more than seventeen characters.⁴¹ The time of the play is "always the present, the exact day and hour at which the play is being performed."⁴² The place is always "the theater, city, and country in which the play is presented."⁴³

The action of the play is concerned with a group of airmen who are fighting in a nameless war and are bombing targets from New Haven to Constantinople to Minnesota. But the characters go to great lengths to assure the audience and each other that they are only, after all, actors playing soldiers. To prove their point they even give their own names and stage credits.

Fisher: It's okay. I'm scared of this mission today too.

Sinclair: You? What are you scared about? I'm the one that has to be killed.

⁴¹The variance in number depending on the number of idiots, which, according to the list of characters, should be "not less than two, not more than five." Joseph Heller, We Bombed in New Haven (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 4. (All references are to this edition).

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

Joe: I'm a little scared also. I'm starting to get a little scared of all of them.

Henderson: I'm not.

Bailey: Aren't you worried at all?

Henderson: Nah, not me. And should I tell you why?

Fisher: Why?

Henderson: Because I'm not really a soldier, that's why. I'm really something much different. I'm an actor...playing the part of a soldier. (Indicating the audience) They know that. Right? And I'm pretty good, too. It's just a little game we're having here now. It's only a play, a show, a little entertainment, so let's not get carried away too far and forget who we really are.

Sinclair: Yeah, sure.

Henderson: ~~Sinclair~~--this soldier I'm pretending to be never even lived, so how could I get killed? He's fictitious, a figment of somebody's imagination. I never met him, and I don't care about him. So what do I give a damn how many guns they've got at Constantinople or what that dumb slob of a Major says. Huh?

Bailey: So? How come you keep complaining all the time?

Henderson: Because my part is too small, that's why. I'm really the most important one here. And I'll tell you something else. I'm also the best one. Did any of you people see me last year in _____? Did any of you see me in _____? ⁴⁴

The play is not projected as "realism" but as a projection where a deliberate uncertainty prevails as the result of having actors present themselves both as characters, and actors. The early comparisons with Pirandello are wholly inappropriate and a case might just as easily be made to link Heller's method with that of Wilder in Our Town.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 25-26.

As the play progresses it becomes clear that Sinclair's fears are well founded and Henderson's "reality" is not necessarily the "reality" of the play. When, in act one, Sinclair is killed, the actor playing Sinclair also disappears. Henderson is further upset when he learns that the soldier he himself is playing will be killed in the next raid--the raid on Minnesota. He tries to escape but returns when Captain Starkey promises him that he will see to it that he gets out of the mission, or out of the play. But Starkey does not have the power to make promises. Henderson is dragged back and shot to death on stage "in front of everybody" for refusing both to play his part in the play or to fly the mission and be killed as he is supposed to according to the script. (Certain critics condemned the play because both actors took curtain calls at the end of the performance. They were disappointed in that they were not "really" killed on the stage). Starkey sets about finding a replacement but each person who turns up, regardless of the name he bears, is Starkey's own son. But Starkey refuses to accept his role even to the end.

Starkey: Now, none of this, of course, is really happening. It's a show, a play in a theater, and I'm not really a captain. I'm _____. You all know that. Do you think that I, _____, would actually let my son go off to a war and be killed... and just stand here talking to you and do nothing? Of course not. There is no war

taking place here ri--. There is no war taking place here now! There has never been a war. There never will be a war. Nobody has been killed here tonight. It's only...make-believe...it's a story... a show. Nobody has ever been killed. I'm going home now. In a few minutes, ushers will pass among you collecting money for the Will Rogers Tuberculosis Sanitarium in Lake Saranac, New York. Give generously.⁴⁵

It is the audience who must decide for themselves. But not without help from Heller. "The whole force of the play is to keep the spectator off balance, to disturb him by forcing him to react, not just to the play, but to the reaction of the actors to the play. To put it another way: the audience is instructed in how to react to the play by watching how the actors react to it, how, as a matter of fact, it ceases to be a play at all for the actors, and becomes reality--which finally makes it a real play."⁴⁶ The deliberate confusion and false sense of security created in both audience and actors allows the play to close around both like a Venus's-flytrap.

But, in the last analysis, it is not the action or the structure of the play which is finally significant-- it is the language. The grammar of the absurd applies here as it does in Catch-22. In this way the play is similar to

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 195-96.

⁴⁶Newsweek, (December 18, 1967), p. 96.

the novel and, more profoundly, similar to what passes for reality. In an unfavorable review, Tom Driver illustrates the point and impact of the play while failing to see it himself.

It's not guns and bombs and moral necessity that soldiers take seriously but words. A modern army might lose all its ordinance and still remain in the field so long as it had not lost its mimeograph machine. To bring it up to date, the Vietnam War is unaffected by the number of victims, the tons of bombs dropped, the cities won and lost, and such other crap, so long as the Commander-in-Chief can hold onto three words: "International Communist Conspiracy." If you look at the State Department's famous White Paper in February 1965, you will see that it is so locked up in its airtight verbal system that no merely empirical evidence of any kind could ever undo the proposition that the North is the Aggressor. Why? Because (and this is worthy of Catch-22) the absence of evidence is said to be the main evidence, since it shows that the Aggressor is so aggressive that he aggressively hides his aggression. To such syntax, falling bombs and flying bodies are no more than commas and semi-colons.⁴⁷

True. But this critic goes on to miss the impact of the play by saying that Heller has not captured this concept of verbal huis clos when he says that "Heller should not be intimidated by the anti-verbal bias of the modern theater, should not be afraid of being a wordy playwright."⁴⁸ The point is that Heller is anything but afraid of words. Driver has failed to see that Heller has united language, action, structure, play and reality.

⁴⁷ Tom F. Driver, "Curtains in Connecticut," Saturday Review, (August 31, 1968), p. 23.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Words are the reality. And that is why the Major carries a copy of the script all through the play. Driver can see a motivation in the State Department's White Paper. Heller is not so naive. The only motivation in the play is that there is no motivation beyond what is happening. And even this Heller refuses to bind in pseudo-logic by creating a situation where neither the players (soldiers?) nor the audience (players?) can ever be finally sure of what is happening, let alone why it is happening.

This is set out in the very opening of the play. Captain Starkey and the Major enter and begin to discuss the business of the day--the bombing of Constantinople.

Starkey: Well, Major? Where are they going today?

Major: Constantinople.

Starkey: There is no Constantinople. It's Istanbul now.

Major: I know that.

Starkey: Then why are we going there?

Major: We're not going there. They are.

Starkey: Why are they going there?

Major: (Tapping his manuscript) Because it says so.⁴⁹

The tone is established. From here on, everyone (actors and audience) knows where he stands--that is, no one knows where he stands. The bifurcated nature of the play rests on the deliberate confusion between the script and "reality," character, person, and actor. Heller refuses

⁴⁹ We Bombed in New Haven, pp. 7-8.

to clarify this confusion so that the final realization for both audience and actors is that it makes no difference anyway.

When, in the second act, Starkey begins to show signs of rebelling--because he has not learned that difference yet--and refuses to go look for Henderson, the Major takes great pains to explain things to him. This is a lengthy excerpt but it contains illustrations regarding other points I have made as well.

Major: I want you to find Henderson.

Starkey: Suppose he's already gone?

Major: He has to be somewhere. Sooner or later, everyone is found. Sooner or later everyone is caught. Even me.

Starkey: You?

Major: Yes. Find Henderson. I'm tired. I work very hard too.

Starkey: I never heard you talk this way.

Major: That's because you never listen. You're always so busy with your wife and your donuts.

Starkey: I do my job, don't I?

Major: You do it very well. Go find Henderson.

Starkey: What will you do with him?

Major: I'm gonna kill him.

Starkey: No, I mean it.

Major: So do I. I'm going to kill him.

Starkey: You can't kill him, really.

Major: Why not?

Starkey: Are you kidding?

Major: Are you?

Starkey: You can't just kill people.

Major: Why not?

Starkey: Because you just--well, can't.

Major: And just what do you think we've been doing?

Starkey: Are you crazy? Who do you think you are?

Major: Who do you think I am? Go find Henderson so I can kill him and get it over with.

Starkey: You really think you're going to kill him?

Major: If I have to.

Starkey: Right here? Right out in front of all these people? In front of all these witnesses?

Major: If I have to.

Starkey: Oh, no. They won't let you. They won't just sit there and let you kill him.

Major: Yes, they will.

Starkey: Listen. Do you mean it when you say that?

Major: Do you mean it when you ask that?

Starkey: Oh, God! Why won't you ever answer a question?

Major: Why won't you?

Starkey: Goddammit, are you trying to make a fool out of me now...out here...with everyone watching?

Major: Don't shout at me.

Starkey: I'm sorry.

Major: Don't swear at me.

Starkey: I'm sorry.

Major: Don't contradict me.

Starkey: I'm sorry.

Major: And don't challenge my authority.

Starkey: I'm sorry. I'm sorry, but...may I ask a question?

Major: Oh, go ahead.

Starkey: Are you acting now? Or do you really mean everything you're saying?

Major: It doesn't matter. Can't you see that? All that does matter is what happens. That's the thing you don't realize. And that's the reason you're so aimless and wishy-washy in just about everything you do.

Starkey: Hey, wait a minute! You start talking that way to me and I'll quit, too.

Major: No, you won't quit. You haven't got the character to quit. Popping off in front of a lot of people like this is just about as far as you'll go.

Starkey: Don't you be so sure.

Major: I am sure. Quit, if you think you can. Go ahead, quit.

Starkey: I quit!

Major: No, you won't quit. You're a captain, and captains don't quit. Captains obey. You're conditioned to agree and you're trained to do as you're told. You like the pay and the prestige, and you do enjoy your job here, remember? So you'll stay right here where you are, do just what you're

supposed to, and continue reciting your lines exactly on cue--just as you're doing right now.

Starkey: No, I'm not! I am not! Goddammit, I'm not!

Major: Yes, you are. Should I show you? (He holds up the script and offers to open it) You can shout it out to them even louder one more time, if it makes you feel so free, and honest, and independent. But after that, you will have to go on saying and doing exactly what you're supposed to...⁵⁰

It is this use of language which takes the action of the play beyond war and the play itself beyond conventional theater. As is the case with Catch-22, the audience cannot simply remain spectators. To see the play simply as a war play is to underestimate its range and impact and to be content with an inane statement which betrays a total lack of understanding of the play and of Heller's intentions.

Witness the following: "Almost any intelligent private can remember when he was the victim of the folly, and occasional imbecility of the brass at the top. Perhaps that is the kind of play Mr. Heller intended to write."⁵¹

No, that is not the kind of play Mr. Heller tried to write. The war is surely there. The imbecility of the military mind, too. Witness the scene in which the men prepare to go into combat armed with baby rattles and

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 139-45.

⁵¹ T. Lewis, p. 447.

pacifiers.⁵² But when Fisher's younger brother, who has become Sinclair's replacement, says simply, "They said it would disrupt my life less if I got killed sooner,"⁵³ what we have is a comment on a concept which is much larger than war.

v. Since Catch-22

Besides working on a new novel which should appear in the near future,⁵⁴ Heller has kept busy tending several other irons. He has reviewed books,⁵⁵ tried his hand at writing screen plays,⁵⁶ and capitalized on Catch-22 and

⁵²We Bombed in New Haven, pp. 75 ff.

⁵³Ibid., p. 103.

⁵⁴In an interview in Mademoiselle, (August 1963), when asked about his next work Heller is supposed to have replied that there was a rumor about that it may never be finished. When asked who started the rumor, he replied, "I did." But in an interview on the CBC television program Take-30, in the fall of 1970, he indicated that it should be ready for publication sometime in 1972.

⁵⁵For an example of Heller's reviews, see The Nation, (January 20, 1962), pp. 62-63 for a review of Waugh's The End of the Battle; and New Republic, (July 30, 1963), pp. 23-24f, for a review of Kazan's Contemporaries.

⁵⁶Heller played a part in the writing of the screenplays of McHales Navy, Sex and the Single Girl and the screenplay for Mandel's novel, The Breakwater. For a humorous account of his near involvement with the James Bond phenomenon, see Holiday, (June 1967), pp. 123-25ff.

his own fame.⁵⁷

"Something happened to me somewhere that robbed me of courage and left me with a fear of discovery."⁵⁸

The speaker is Joe Slocum, hero of Joseph Heller's proposed next novel. The novel has been rumored since the publication of Catch-22 but has not yet appeared.

Following the same procedure as he did with Catch-22, Heller has published one chapter well in advance of the novel.

While it is virtually impossible to make meaningful comments on a novel from a pre-published chapter which may or may not appear in the final version, this excerpt offers some interesting possibilities. It seems that Heller is about to prove conclusively that Catch-22 is more than a war novel. The setting is no longer war but the heart of modern America--the world of big business. "Something Happened" may become "Yassarian in the Grey Flannel Suit." That may, or may not, mean that Heller will repeat himself.

Joe Slocum is a high-paid executive who works in a very large, soul-destroying, but very benevolent company.

⁵⁷For examples of this see: Holiday (April 1967), pp. 44-61f; Show (April 1963), pp. 50-52ff; and Playboy, (December 1969), pp. 181-182ff.

⁵⁸Joseph Heller, "Something Happened: Condensation of a Novel," Esquire (September 1966), p. 137.

a company which exists to sell. "That's the reason we were hired, and the reason we are paid. It's the reason we exist."⁵⁹ It's a great life if you don't think about it. Like a gigantic German square dance, according to Slocum. "We come to work, have lunch and go home. We goose-step in and goose-step out, change our partners and wander all about, sashay around for a pat on the head, and promenade home till we all drop dead."⁶⁰

The same operative principle which pervaded Catch-22 exists here as well. Fear and impotence rule. No one is happy, yet everyone appears contented and gives the impression that everything is fine. And the machine runs on.

In the office in which I work there are five people of whom I am afraid. Each of these five people is afraid of four people, for a total of twenty, and each of these twenty people is afraid of six people, making a total of one hundred and twenty people in this echelon who are feared by at least one person on an echelon below. Each of these one hundred and twenty people is afraid of the other one hundred and nineteen, and all of these one hundred and forty-five people are afraid of the twelve men at the top who helped found and build the company and now own and direct it, all of them elderly now.⁶¹

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 140.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 138.

The situation is a statistician's dream. The digits are people but nobody seems to mind because the company keeps growing and selling and making money.

My company keeps growing, and in many respects we are the leader in the field. We have twenty-nine offices, twelve in this country, two in Canada, four in Latin America, and eleven overseas. We average three suicides a year: two men, usually on the middle-executive level, kill themselves every twelve months, almost always by gunshot, and one girl, usually unmarried, separated, or divorced, who does it with sleeping pills. Salaries are high, vacations are long. A little over ten percent of the full time personnel on the domestic staff receive psychiatric care of one kind or another; this statistic came to light when the company experimented with a major--medical group--insurance plan that included payment for nervous and mental disorders. The plan was discontinued after one year. It was too costly.⁶²

Jack Green, Slocum's immediate superior, has heard rumors that he is soon to be fired. He asks Slocum to keep his ears open and report anything he hears. That same day Slocum is called to the boss's office. He is told to begin preparing himself to replace Green.

"What did he want?" Green demands, the instant I return.

"Nothing," I reply.

"Did he say anything about me?"

"No."

"Well, what did he want? He must have wanted to see you about something."

"He wanted me to put some jokes in a speech his son has to make at school."⁶³

⁶²Ibid., p. 139.

⁶³Ibid., p. 213.

Yossarian has come home, changed his name, gotten married and taken a job. But his conscience is still with him. He still, apparently, has those misgivings.

I've got bad feet. I've got a jawbone that's deteriorating and someday soon I'm going to have to have all my teeth pulled. I've got an unhappy wife to support and three unhappy children to take care of. I've got eight people working for me who have problems and unhappy dependents of their own. I've got anxiety: I repress hysteria. I've got wars on my mind and summer riots, peace movements and L.S.D. I've got old age to face. My boy, though still an innocent and unsuspecting child, is going to have to spend from two to six years of his life in the Army or Navy, and probably at war. I've got the decline of American culture and the guilt and ineptitude of the whole Government of the United States to carry around on my poor shoulders. And I find I'm being groomed for a better job.

And I find that I want it.⁶⁴

Further comment will have to depend on the publication of the novel. But something happened back in 1961 when Catch-22 was first published. What has been said so far is meant only to create a perspective from which to view the significance of that event.

⁶⁴Ibid.

CHAPTER II

CATCH-22 AS A WAR NOVEL

i. "Better to live on one's feet..."

Wars are not a twentieth century phenomenon. In the twentieth century, however, we have been treated to war with a difference. We have, on two separate occasions, managed to wage war on a global scale. We have subjected war to progress.

We need no more that light of day,
No need of faces to be seen;
The squadrons in the skies we slay
Through moving shadows on a screen
By nailing echoes under sea,
We kill with like geometry.

Both wars have provided the matter for a large number of novels and while the majority of these can best be considered as unfortunate experiences,² there were enough novels of note produced in the aftermath of each war to establish a sub-genre, that of the "war novel," with its own conventions and norms.

¹The Collected Poems of E.J. Pratt (1962), p. 111.

²I am thinking here of the dime store "war novels" which appear next to the Doctor/Nurse collections. For an example of this type see: Robert Leckie, The March to Glory. It is worthy of note also that the dime store war novel is essentially a World War II phenomenon.

As was inevitable, Catch-22 was immediately upon its publication classed under this heading. Amid their confusion the critics could rely on that certain fact. The novel had its setting in war, most of the action was concerned with war, the characters wore uniforms, flew aeroplanes and dropped bombs. Surely this was a war novel. There were critics, however, who considered even this too broad a generalization and insisted that although Catch-22 was not successful, not a very good novel, it might still be said of it that "it is the strangest novel yet written about the United States Air Force in World War II."³

Still another critic, while he seemed sure of little else--"virtually nothing in it [the novel] makes sense"--was sure it was a war novel. "For reasons he [Heller] does not reveal, he has set himself a dedicated task of writing a long novel ridiculing the United States Army."⁴ This opinion, perhaps, was extreme. Some critics were certain they had discovered Heller's purpose. But there was little agreement as to the exact nature of that purpose. Satire was the most frequent

³Orville Prescott, "Books for the Times," New York Times, October 23, 1961.

⁴Sheppard Butler, "Army System Ridiculed in a Dedicated Mission," Post (Bridgeport, Connecticut), October 15, 1961.

choice. "Fantasy" was the word one critic used, but fantasy with an unmistakable satiric content. He continued by pointing out that the United States Air Force during the Second World War was the particular object of this satire, but saw the novel as being a satire on war in general as well.⁵

On the other hand, there were those who saw the novel as being simply a comic treatment of war--a good hearty laugh; fine entertainment. The reviewer for a well known Canadian daily may be cited here: "Some of the reviewers of Catch-22 have implied that the novel has a serious purpose, and it's true that the war its characters are concerned to escape and survive casts a shadow somewhere in the background. But I prefer to read it simply as a comic novel."⁶ It took a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Air Force Reserve, however, to state the case simply regarding the novel's supposed "entertainment" potential. "If you have been in the service--buy the book--and whenever you want to laugh, to be entertained or be nostalgic for the service, read it and reread it for the book will never let you down in its prime purpose, that

⁵"New Novels," London Times, June 14, 1962.

⁶The Toronto Star, October 20, 1962.

of entertaining."⁷

It might be mentioned that most of the foregoing comments are gleaned from the popular press. It might be well to glance at what an anonymous reviewer in a scholarly magazine of repute has to say about the novel in this context. The reviewer placed the novel squarely in the "war novel" sub-genre, even to the point of enumerating the book's supposedly stereotyped war routines.

The book has no story. It alternates, by means of the "advanced" technique of fragmented structure, five standard routines: I. Hospital routine, with malingering soldiers and incompetent staff; II. Combat routine, with everything snafu, yet missions accomplished with negligent gallantry; III. Funny fraud routine, involving army supplies and G.I. tycoon; IV. Red tape routine, at training center and headquarters; V. Leave in Rome routine, with orgies.⁸

Having looked briefly at these expressions of befuddlement, it is necessary to make one point very clear before beginning a discussion of Heller's novel in the "war novel" context. Catch-22 is not a war novel, or, more precisely, it is much more than a war novel. To limit Catch-22 to such a narrow scope is to do it, and its author, a grave injustice. So to confine the novel confines the critic himself to a narrow conclusion such as the following:

⁷Harry R. Carlson, "Catch-22: A Fantastic Piece of Work that is Entertaining," Jamestown Post-Journal, November 25, 1961.

⁸Daedalus, 92:1, (Winter 1963), p. 158.

[Catch-22] is launched in reaction to the type of creative mentality which allows a soldier to exhort his comrades with the cry of "C'mon you sons of bitches--let's go get killed on that high ground up there!" yet which can exercise a paradoxical fastidiousness in evading explicit reference to "that Verb, that single, ugly, four-letter word that lies embedded like a dirty, recurrent jewel in the mosaic of Marine vocabulary." It is against such preposterous attitudinizing, against the peddling of such flagrant misrepresentations, that the essential antagonisms of Catch-22 are directed.⁹

Nevertheless, there is something to be gained from a consideration of Catch-22 within the context of the "war novel" sub-genre. For, as Payne points out in his study, Catch-22 unites several elements in the type--the serious, the naturalistic, the comic, the absurd--and by the use of parody and satire reduces the naive elements of such writing to their proper place and succeeds in making a statement about war that few of the "war novels" could match even within the limited context of war itself. But the necessity then arises to extend the conclusions made in this context beyond the confines of war to encompass all that passes for reality and beyond the "war novel" to the novel per se. Only then will one do justice to Catch-22. As one critic rightly suggests "to say that Catch-22 is a novel about a group of men in the armed forces of the United

⁹Kenneth W. Payne, The New Morality of Catch-22: Convention and Innovation in the War Theme (1968), p. 73.

States--specifically in the U.S. Air Force during World War II--is like saying that Moby Dick is a story about whale hunting."¹⁰

The war novels which surround the two world wars cannot with ease be collected under an all-inclusive critical heading. The two wars presented two very different experiences and they produced very different reactions. The wars of the twentieth century radically changed many of the traditional concepts of war and the men who wage it. It is only to be expected that such changes in attitude should be reflected in the literature surrounding the wars. John Aldridge, whose After the Lost Generation (1951) is an attempt to put into perspective the relation between the writers of both wars, tends to look unfavorably on the writing of the second World War in relation to that of the first. Writing of some of the novelists who have dealt with the second World War he asserts that:

Although they have arrived at the end of the tradition of loss, negation, and revolt, and have known none of its benefits, they have inherited the conditions out of which that tradition emerged. They are finding that modern life is still basically purposeless, that the typical condition of modern man is still doubt, confusion, and fear. But because they have never known life otherwise and were not exposed,

¹⁰Mary Bancroft, "No Lilliputians Here," Manhattan East, February 1, 1962.

as their predecessors were, to the process by which it became as it now is, they can write of it from neither the perspective of protest nor that of disillusionment and loss.¹¹

Aldridge's stand is based on the contention that the merits of the literature surrounding the first World War are to be measured by the degree to which it is a diary of the moral, cultural, spiritual, and artistic unrest of the times. The theory is that, from a literary standpoint at least, the war was as much an idea as it was a fact. "The war acted as a catalyst, symbolized the dissolution of an age, and the writing of the epoch leaves the literary record of the erosion of the outmoded values and the search for substitute techniques and media of expression."¹²

Because there was apparently no parallel literary or cultural upheaval following the second World War, and because of the different circumstances surrounding each war, Aldridge goes on to say that:

the new novelists seem, for the most part, incapable of technical discoveries and resigned to working within the tradition handed down to them from the Twenties. One explanation is that the experience of war is no longer new and, consequently, does not require a new method of presentation. Another is that the Lost Generation writers were engaged in a revolution designed to purge language of the old restraints of the

¹¹ John W. Aldridge, After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars (1951), p. 90.

¹² Payne, p. 4.

previous century and to fit it to the demands of a younger, more realistic time.¹³

Malcolm Cowley expresses a similar attitude. Speaking of the writers of the first World War he states that:

The young men who wrote the books were in revolt because their elders had betrayed them and slaughtered their friends and because they believed that the world would be better if all the principles of the elders were set aside. They said, and deeply felt, "The war was wrong," then rushed on to a broader conclusion: "All wars are evil, like the munitions makers who ferment them for dividends and like the governments that order young men to be killed."¹⁴

He sees the novelists of the second World War in almost a totally opposite position:

In general the new novelists do not presume to judge the war. They do not suggest that, given the temper of the people, it might have been avoided by wiser statesmanship. They are not in revolt against the war itself so much as they are disappointed by the fruits of victory.... In a word, many of the novelists are really disillusioned this time, instead of being rebellious, and the disillusion lends a more conservative tone to their writing.¹⁵

It should be noted that the comments of both Aldridge and Cowley pre-date the publication of Catch-22. And this is significant for "Catch-22" comes as a refreshing and stimulating answer to those, like Aldridge, who assure us

¹³ Aldridge, p. 88.

¹⁴ Malcolm Cowley, "War Novels: After Two Wars," in Modern American Fiction: Essays in Criticism, ed. A. Walton Litz (1967), pp. 310-11.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 312.

that the "perspective of protest" is untenable for the descendants of the Lost Generation, or to those of Cowley's persuasion, who discern in the modern writer a reluctance to commit himself in so dramatic a fashion to the tenets of the anti-war school."¹⁶

There can be little doubt that Catch-22--even when considered within the restricting confines of the war novel sub-genre--is a masterful denunciation of "the war itself" as well as a very definite refutation of the idea that a novel dealing with the second World War is constrained to exist within and to repeat "the tradition handed down from the Twenties." Heller himself adds something to the discussion when he speaks about Catch-22 in relation to war novels. "There was a terrible sameness about books being published and I almost stopped reading as well as writing. I didn't want just to write the kind of book I had stopped reading."¹⁷

To determine whether Heller succeeded in writing a novel other than the type he mentions it is necessary to look briefly at the tradition of the war novel and to measure Catch-22 against it. Payne considers Catch-22 as drawing on three separate traditions of war writing:

¹⁶Payne, pp. 7-8.

¹⁷As reported in: W.J. Weatherby, "The Joy Catcher," The Guardian, November 20, 1962.

namely, it is a parody of the Mailer-Jones school of naturalistic writing and the fatuous glamorization of the "war story" in motion picture, magazine and dime store novel form; a unique fusion of the serious and comic elements in war writing; and, a partial return to the classic anti-war writing of the first World War.¹⁸

Whatever Tennyson's intentions in "The Charge Of The Light Brigade," the surface sentiments of "Their's not to make reply,/ Their's not to reason why/ Their's but to do or die" have continued to find new formulations--two global wars notwithstanding. And, whatever else may be said about the literature which surrounds these wars, it may be generally stated that running through all of it is a note of uneasiness occasioned by the collision of these sentiments with the fact of war. The old ways die hard and despite the disillusionment and sense of loss expressed by Paul Baumer, the protagonist of All Quiet on the Western Front, (1929), when he says that under the fury of the first bombardment "the world as they [the older generation] had taught it to us broke into pieces,"¹⁹ the meaning of the word "coward"--in its full conventional sense--is still very

¹⁸ Payne, pp. 8-9.

¹⁹ Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front (1970), p. 12.

clear to him. Even though he feels betrayed by his elders and finds that their oratorical ideals clash violently with the reality of war as he knows it, he can still take pride in the fact that the young men caught up in the war "were no mutineers, no deserters, no cowards," and is boastful that "we loved our country as much as they; [and] went courageously into every action."²⁰

Frederick Henry, in A Farewell to Arms, (1929), may have fewer illusions and may express his feelings in a more cynical tone, but he is not willing to deny validity to the sentiments (words?) themselves.

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain.... I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done to the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.²¹

This dissent is, in a very real sense, a question of semantics. Words such as patriotism, courage, sacred, and glorious, have, in this context, been perverted and

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (1957), pp. 184-85.

rendered obscene by the modern situation. But the validity of the concepts themselves, the inherent semantic "truth" of these sentiments per se, are not challenged. Such dissent was not entirely new--perhaps not new at all--but it was essentially different in its formulation. Leslie Fiedler points to this fact in his "foreword" to the Selver translation of Hasek's The Good Soldier Schweik--perhaps the one outstanding exception to every general statement which may be made about the novels of the Great War--when he says:

There are in the traditional literatures of Europe, to be sure, characters who have believed that death was the worst event and honor a figment: but such characters have always belonged to "low comedy," i.e., they have been comic butts set against representatives of quite other ideals, Sancho Panzas who serve Don Quixotes, Falstaffs who tremble before Prince Hals, Leporellos who cower as the Don Giovanni tempt fate. They have been permitted to blaspheme against the courtly codes precisely because those codes have been so secure. And, in any event, their cowardice has always spoken in prose or dialect, worn the garb of the servant or vassal, bowed the knee before an unchallenged master. They represented not a satirical challenge but precisely a "comic relief" from the strain of upholding--against the promptings of our animal nature, the demands of indolence, and greed, and fear--those high values that were once thought to make men fully human.²²

Fiedler goes on to point out the limitations of this view but, literally, it could be used as a perfect

²² Leslie A. Fiedler, "Foreword," to Jaroslav Hasek, The Good Soldier Schweik (1963), pp. ix-x.

formulation of the comfortable narrowmindedness, both popular and critical, against which Catch-22 operates. There is a gratuitousness in such a limited view which does a definite injustice to the works cited.²³ The protagonists of the novels of these wars, however, cannot be dismissed as "comic butts" and rescals. They are ordinary, intelligent young men striving to impose meaning on a world which has been handed down to them. They are aware of the position in which they have been placed by the "armchair patriots," aware of the shallowness of bright uniforms, military music and martial ballads. Yet, out of these novels there evolved no machinery whereby a contrary set of values became viable. The search continued.

Hemingway could find nothing "permanent and representative" in Barbusse's Under Fire (1926) because "his whole book was a protest and an attitude. The attitude was that he hated it."²⁴ And in the same context Hemingway could still cling to the traditional concepts when he wrote that:

²³The idea in question is that which can dismiss Falstaff as pure "comic relief" and deny to Sancho Panza the genuine satiric value to which he is entitled. Such a stand is the result of the same type of critical camouflage mentioned above in relation to Tennyson. There is a similarity between Falstaff and Yossarian which cannot be admitted by such a critical view.

²⁴Ernest Hemingway, Introduction to Men at War (1960), p. 9.

Cowardice, as distinguished from panic, is always simply a lack of ability to suspend the functioning of the imagination. Learning to suspend your imagination and live completely in the very second of the present minute with no before and no after is the greatest gift a soldier can acquire.²⁵

Similar attempts to examine the nature of cowardice, courage and panic have been attempted by many others, including Mailer and Jones.

Against this background Catch-22 presents what is in essence, a complete reversal of the semantic value of these sentiments vis-à-vis the war ethic. Numerous examples can be used, including those cited above, to illustrate this change between the approaches of Catch-22 and the traditional war novel. However, the radical nature of this departure can best be illustrated by comparing Catch-22 with a novel which has as its central concept the re-affirmation of the semantics of the traditional view. Such a novel is Ernst Junger's The Storm of Steel (1929).

The concept of the coward is a consideration in this novel as well. A soldier is tempted with thoughts of desertion and reacts as follows:

Well, why don't you jump up and rush off into the night till you collapse in safety behind a bush like an exhausted animal? Why do you hang on there all the time, you and your braves? There are no superior officers to see you. Yet someone watches you. Unknown perhaps to yourself, there is someone within you who keeps you to your post

²⁵Ibid., p. 17.

by the power of two mighty spells: Duty and Honour. You know that this is your place in the battle, and that a whole people relies on you to do your job. You feel, "If I leave my post, I am a coward in my own eyes, a wretch who will ever after blush at every word of praise."²⁶

Even though such sentiments are extreme they can, nevertheless, be seen as magnifications of the inclinations expressed by Paul Baumer and Frederick Henry.

The concept of patriotism also may be compared. The stormtroop officer reflects on his war experiences:

Now I looked back: four years of development in the midst of a generation predestined to death, spent in caves, smoke-filled trenches, and shell-illuminated wastes...a monstrous calendar full of hardships and privation, divided by the red-letter days of battles. And almost without any thought of mine, the idea of the Fatherland had been distilled from all those afflictions in a clearer and brighter essence. That was the final winnings in a game on which so often all had been staked: the nation was no longer for me an empty thought veiled in symbols; and how could it have been otherwise when I had seen so many die for its sake...without a thought.²⁷

Before attempting conclusions it is worthwhile to listen to Yossarian on similar subjects. First, Yossarian on cowardice:

²⁶ Ernst Junger, The Storm of Steel: From the Diary of a German Stormtroop Officer on the Western Front (1929), p. 180.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 316.

Aarfy was a dedicated fraternity man who loved cheerleading and class reunions and did not have brains enough to be afraid. Yossarian did have brains enough and was, and the only thing that stopped him from abandoning his post under fire and scurrying back through the crawlway like a yellow-bellied rat was his unwillingness to entrust the evasive action out of the target area to anybody else. There was nobody else in the world he would honor with so great a responsibility. There was nobody else he knew who was as big a coward.²⁸

And, in what is obviously a set piece in the novel, Heller gives us the conversation between Nately and the Old Man in the Roman whorehouse. This is rather long to cite in full, but it is essential to an understanding of the novel in this context.

"You put so much stock in winning wars," the grubby iniquitous old man scoffed. "The real trick lies in losing wars, in knowing which wars can be lost. Italy has been losing wars for centuries, and just see how splendidly we've done nonetheless. France wins wars and is in a continual state of crisis. Germany loses and prospers. Look at our own recent history. Italy won a war in Ethiopia and promptly stumbled into serious trouble. Victory gave us such insane delusions of grandeur that we helped start a world war we hadn't a chance of winning. But now that we are losing again, everything has taken a turn for the better, and we will certainly come out on top again if we succeed in being defeated."

Nately gaped at him in undisguised befuddlement. "Now I really don't understand what you're saying. You talk like a madman."

"But I live like a sane one..."

"But," Nately cried out in disbelief, "you're a turncoat! A time-server! A shameful, unscrupulous opportunist!"

²⁸ Catch-22, p. 49.

"I am a hundred and seven years old," the old man reminded him suavely.

"Don't you have any principles?"

"Of course not."

"No morality?"

"Oh, I am a very moral man..."

Nately was appalled and bewildered by the abominable old man's inability to perceive the enormity of his offense. "Don't you realize what you've done?" he scolded vehemently. "Major-----de Coverley is a noble and wonderful person, and everyone admires him."

"He's a silly old fool who really has no right acting like a silly young fool. Where is he today? Dead?"

Nately answered softly with somber awe.

"Nobody knows. He seems to have disappeared."

"You see? Imagine a man his age risking what little life he has left for something so absurd as a country."

Nately was instantly up in arms again.

"There is nothing so absurd about risking your life for your country!" he declared.

"Isn't there?" asked the old man. "What is a country? A country is a piece of land surrounded on all sides by boundaries, usually unnatural. Englishmen are dying for England, Americans are dying for America, Germans are dying for Germany, Russians are dying for Russia. There are now fifty or sixty countries fighting in this war. Surely so many countries can't all be worth dying for."

"Anything worth living for," said Nately, "is worth dying for."

"And anything worth dying for," answered the sacrilegious old man, "is certainly worth living for..." "Why don't you use some common sense and try to be more like me?"

"Because it's better to die on one's feet than live on one's knees," Nately retorted with triumphant and lofty conviction. "I guess you've heard that saying before."

"Yes, I certainly have," mused the treacherous old man, smiling again. "But I'm afraid you have it backward. It is better to live on one's feet than die on one's knees. That is the way the saying goes."²⁹

What is demonstrated here is not just a "cute" semantic twist. It is the basic assumptions behind the semantic euphemisms that are being attacked. The roles of the coward and hero are here reversed. But it does not stop there. As Natelly realizes, it is his language which has been subverted. And further, it is the logic which operates behind the language which has ceased to function. The coward and the hero have not only changed roles, but their positions have been equated with sanity and madness respectively. The coward is mad in the traditional view because he speaks without the connotative shield of semantics which supports concepts such as "dying for one's country," and "better dead than red." But in a real sense this "madness" can only be viewed as an intuitive sanity. The logic of the old man's "madness" is more sane than that of Natelly's "sanity" because it is more rational, more human. The old man may "talk like a madman," but he lives "like a sane one." The opposite statement applied to Natelly is that while he talks like a sane man he lives like a mad one. This distinction is central to the novel. One is forced to take sides. To Yossarian those around him are mad and he is sane; to those around him Yossarian is mad and they are sane. It is as simple and as complex as this.

The old man denies Natelly's charge of immorality. So would Yossarian. Yossarian is a moral man but his is a morality based on refusal rather than acceptance.³⁰ But a refusal of such a nature needs justification. His refusal basically is a refusal to accept the dictates of an insane world.

"Insanity is contagious. This is the only sane ward in the whole hospital. Everybody is crazy here but us. This is probably the only sane ward in the whole world, for that matter."³¹

Yossarian knows the nature of this refusal. He is in the hospital to avoid being killed; he is also there to avoid madness. Remaining alive and remaining sane become the same problem. To give himself over to the possibility of death is to accept the insanity of the world in which he is trapped. He knows--even to the end of the novel--that he may be incapable of restoring this world but he also refuses to become another of its victims. This is the meaning of his vow to "live forever or die in the attempt."³² And that will not be easy for him.

Everywhere he looked was a nut, and it was all a sensible young gentleman like himself could do to maintain his perspective amid so much madness. And it was urgent that he did, for he knew his life was in peril.³³

³⁰ Robert Brustein, "The Logic of Survival in a Lunatic World," New Republic (November 13, 1961), p. 13.

³¹ Catch-22, p. 14.

³² Ibid., p. 29.

³³ Ibid., p. 20.

The question arises, of course, concerning the validity of Yossarian's stand. What evidence is there that the world is insane? One might be content to say "read the novel and if that is not enough, look around," but more argument than this is required. Leslie Fiedler hints at such proof in the paragraph immediately following the one cited above when he asks:

What happens, however, when the Leporellos, the Falstaffs, and the Sancho Panzas begin to inherit the earth? When the remaining masters are in fact more egregious Falstaffs and Leporellos and Sancho Panzas, and all that Don Quixote and Prince Hal and Don Giovanni once stood for is discredited or dead? What happens in a time when war itself is transformed by the industrial revolution?³⁴

What happens, is the twentieth century, the age foreshadowed by Hardy, whose children were the Paul Baumers and Frederick Henrys and whose adults are Yossarians, but Yossarians only if they have managed to remain sane. For the "armchair patriots" have matured into the Cathcarts, Minderbinders, Kornes and "silent majorities." Central to remaining sane is the formulation of a "logic of survival" as Brustein phrases it. It is a logic which restores honor and sanity to man. And the distance we have traveled can be measured by the fact that this man is then branded a coward.

³⁴Fiedler, p. ix.

Possession of this logic may not change the world.

"Insanity is contagious," sanity, apparently, is not.

Certainly there are enough wars in progress to prove that point. But, as Fiedler points out, while the anti-war novel did not end war,

it memorializes the end of something almost as deeply rooted in the culture of the West: the concept of Honor. It comes into existence at the moment when in the West men...come to believe that the worst thing of all is to die-- more exactly, perhaps, the moment when for the first time in a thousand years it is possible to admit that no cause is worth dying for. There are various mitigated forms of this new article of faith: that no cause is worth the death of all humanity, or of a whole nation, or simply of millions of lives; but inevitably it approaches the formulation: no cause is worth the death of a man, no cause is worth the death of me.³⁵

There are those who will be constrained to ask the inevitable question: "Suppose everyone felt that way?"

To which question Yossarian's logic would surely answer:

"Then I'd certainly be a damned fool to feel any other way, wouldn't I?"³⁶ And the least that could happen then would be that an insane world would regain sanity.

There is, of course, an alternative. There is always the possibility that the condition envisioned by Patrick Ryan could become the reality. In the epilogue

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Catch-22, p. 436.

to his novel, How I Won the War, the hero, Ernest Goodbody, eulogizes the youth of Britain:

I am confident that they will rally again to the Flag, look up in defiance as the mushroom cloud foams across the sky, face the nuclear fall-out with unflinching courage, and start a fresh page in our Glorious History as the symbols of the New Elizabethan Age, proud to be known as the first of the Heavily Radio-active Civilians.³⁷

ii. The laughing face of death

"War," as the saying goes, "is hell." And hell, apparently, is no laughing matter. Yet, the second World War--perhaps the most sustained vision of hell to which humanity has yet been exposed--produced, in America at least, a crop of comic novels, and, in more recent years, several popular (and for the most part banal) television serials based on the premise that war is actually a very funny affair.

To explore the reasons behind such a phenomenon would require a major study in itself although something of its nature can perhaps be understood in the light of a parallel occurrence--the fascination of the present with James Bond and associates. At a time when the wildest imaginings of George Orwell are continually outstripped

³⁷Patrick Ryan, How I Won The War (1967), p. 256.

by daily events, the glamorization of the spy trade assumes a grotesque quality. Similarly, at a time when war has reached its most insane nuclear potential the popularity of the purely comic war novel assumes a quality not unlike the laughter of a child who finds himself suddenly alone in a darkened room.

Heller's satirical eye has not missed this point and while the reviewer for Daedalus is correct in listing the stereotyped routines which appear in Catch-22, he is at a loss to know what to do with them in the context of this novel. The routines he has in mind are those of the comic war novel such as: William Brinkley's Don't Go Near the Water, Thomas Heggen's Mister Roberts, Mac Hyman's No Time for Sergeants, Henry Williams' Ensign Pulver, Leo Rosten's Captain Newman, M.D., and a host of others of the same type. What the reviewer fails to see is that Catch-22 is not another novel to add to this collection.

The fault of this critic--and he is not alone--is that he mistakes a superficial similarity for a more essential likeness which does not exist. Heller may be seen as adapting--but not adopting--several prototypes from these novels and exploiting them for his own ends. We find in Catch-22, as in the novels mentioned above, the type of the incompetent or insane or sadistic superior officer; the naive young soldier caught in a labyrinth of

regulations and "red tape"; the ever-present "Doc"; the nurses, the whores, and the "operator" who thrives. But, whereas in the other novels these types are exploited almost totally for their comic value, in Catch-22 they are deliberately brought out of the comic convention and by means of exaggeration and distortion given a grotesque and sinister quality which continually forces one back to the insanity of war and the insanity of a world which condones it. If there are scenes of a purely comic nature in the novel they are few. The logic of catch-22 is seldom a laughing matter.

An indication of Heller's approach can be gathered from a comparison between some of the recurrent motifs already mentioned and Heller's treatment of them. The publicity hungry superior officer appears in Brinkley's Don't Go Near the Water in the person of Commander Nash. In this novel the war becomes a war of public relations between the navy--which does not wish to go near the water--and the other branches of the military. Nash sets up a news service to keep the folks at home informed about the exploits of the local boys in the navy. The immediate result is an inordinate increase in useless paperwork and the end result is the selection of one Farragut Jones as the typical young sailor--who is, incidentally, exactly that, although he differs considerably from the image created

by Nash's publicity.

A similar desire on the part of Colonel Cathcart in Catch-22 centers upon his desire to appear in a feature article in The Saturday Evening Post. He is willing to try anything to achieve this end. He toys with the idea of having prayers said before the men go on bombing missions but dismisses the notion when he learns that enlisted men and officers pray to the same God. But Cathcart has one way left. He keeps raising the number of missions required to astronomical levels in the hope of attracting attention to his squadron and thus to himself.

Lieutenant Commander Morton, in Ensign Pulver, has a craving for recognition as well and very early in the novel we learn that "the biggest single thing on [his] mind...was his hunger for promotion to full Commander." To enhance his chances for promotion he is willing to risk setting sail during a tropical storm despite all warnings to the contrary. His position is that

"The Admiral wants this ship at Apathy Island in five days--and that's where she'll be, hurricane, high water, fire or the end of the world itself."³⁸

A multiplication of examples of such surface similarities is not necessary. What is necessary is a look beneath the surface at the use Heller makes of these

³⁸Henry Williams, Ensign Pulver (1964), p. 112.

adaptations. Nothing very serious occurs as a result of Nash's publicity schemes. Cathcart's mania for recognition is something else again. The frantic increase in the number of required missions causes the comedy to fade into the background and brings catch-22 to the forefront. With every increase in the number of required missions, more men die. And while justice is hardly a consideration, it is not comic to realize that many of those who die have already served their time and die only because they have been required--for the sake of Cathcart's reputation--to tempt fate once too often. The frantic efforts on the part of the men constantly to readjust themselves to Cathcart's insane whims reduces Pianosa to a surreal labyrinth full of scurrying, terrified men who more and more come to realize that the only exit is death. This is the supreme catch.

Morton is a participant in the working of his own stupidity. He is willing to attempt, himself, anything he demands from his men. The only tragedy which occurs is the continual embarrassment of being caught "with his foot in his mouth." Cathcart, on the other hand, is always one step removed from the effects of his insane demands. Like some whimsical demi-god he controls the action but seldom becomes a participant. The logic of catch-22 allows him to pass such unpleasant business along to his subordinates. This point is made very clear in a

conversation between Cathcart and Milo Minderbinder--
another of the keepers in this zoo.

"I'll bet it's not generally known, Milo, that I myself have flown only four missions, is it?"

"No, sir," Milo replied. It's generally known that you've flown only two missions. And that one of those occurred when Aarfy accidentally flew you over enemy territory while navigating you to Naples for a black-market water cooler."³⁹

During the debate between Cathcart and Korn concerning Yossarian's "second run" over the target at Ferrara, Cathcart's main concern is how such an incident will reflect on him when it is written up in the report. Kraft's plane had been shot down on this second run and Cathcart sees this as a possible mark against him--a "black eye" instead of "a feather in his cap." Even though Korn admits that the second run must have taken considerable courage, Cathcart dismisses this as being of little significance and they finally decide to "act boastfully about something we ought to be ashamed of"⁴⁰ and award Yossarian a medal instead of subjecting him to a court martial. Cathcart, however, wishes his position on the matter to remain clear:

³⁹Catch-22, p. 364.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 137.

"It's not that I'm being sentimental or anything. I don't give a damn about the men or the airplane. It's just that it looks lousy on the report. How am I going to cover up something like this in the report."⁴¹

The stereotyped bickering among soldiers that usually leads, in the comic novels, to nothing more serious than the cancellation of a weekend pass or the loss of a favorite ration assumes a very different complexion in Chief White Halfoat's vow to cut Captain Flume's throat. The recurrent motif of the conspiracy to embarrass superiors--such as the plot by Roberts and Pulver in Mister Roberts to shoot a ball of lead foil at the captain--becomes, in Catch-22, a retributive attempt to set catch-22 back upon its guardians in Dobbs' plot to murder Cathcart. All Dobbs needs is the approval and assistance of Yossarian.

"I couldn't do it without you," Dobbs explained.
 "I need you to tell me to go ahead."
 Yossarian found it hard to believe him. "Is that all you want me to do? Just tell you to go ahead?"
 "That's all I need from you," Dobbs answered.
 "Just tell me to go ahead and I'll blow his brains out all by myself the day after tomorrow...I'd like to shoot Colonel Korn in the head, too, while we're at it, although I'd like to spare Major Danby, if that's all right with you. Then I'd like to murder Appleby and Havermeyer also, and after we finish murdering Appleby and Havermeyer I'd like to murder McWatt."⁴²

The off-hand tone and the incremental build-up of Dobbs' speech is not unlike that used by Cathcart himself

⁴¹Ibid., p. 136.

⁴²Ibid., p. 223.

when talking about men and men's lives. In the world presided over by Cathcart such a "blood bath" would not be totally inappropriate as a reprisal, far-fetched though it sounds. It is no more outlandish than the bombing of his own airfield by Milo.

The motif of the dedicated soldier, committed to absolute obedience to every rule and regulation receives a different and a more grotesque reality in Heller's novel. The adherence to picayune regulations and the letter of the law causes Ensign Keith in Mister Roberts to deprive Dowdy, the boatswain's mate, of six very precious bottles of beer.⁴³ A similar perfectionist attitude on the part of Havermeyer deprives men of their lives..

Havermeyer was the best damned bombardier they had, but he flew straight and level all the way from the I.P. to the target area, and even far beyond the target until he saw the falling bombs strike ground and explode in a darting spurt of abrupt orange that flashed beneath the swirling pall of smoke and pulverized debris geysering up wildly in huge, rolling waves of gray and black. Havermeyer held mortal men rigid in six planes as steady and still as sitting ducks while he followed the bombs all the way down through the plexiglass nose with deep interest and gave the German gunners below all the time they needed to set their sights and take their aim and pull their triggers or lanyards or switches or whatever the hell they did pull when they wanted to kill people they didn't know.⁴⁴

⁴³Thomas Heggen, Mister Roberts (1946), p. 24.

⁴⁴Catch-22, p. 29.

My intention in the last few pages has not been to prove that Heller is no more than an author who produces a novel which rests solely on giving different emphasis to a body of time-tested devices. The overall impact of Catch-22 is so different from these novels as to make comparison superfluous except in a well defined and limited context. By momentarily treating Catch-22 as a "war novel" such a context is created. What becomes apparent then is that Heller has not written another comic war novel. Instead, he deliberately distorts the comic situation to maintain the basic moral tone of the novel and to keep the action of the novel firmly grounded in a grotesque and violent reality. As the comic situations are extended and distorted they become less comic and more and more dehumanized. In this way the war situation gradually becomes a mirror image of the larger themes with which the novel is concerned.

Perhaps the one most significant departure from the war novel sub-genre to be noted concerning Catch-22 is that the war itself--and the seriousness which war demands--is continually and deliberately infused into the supposed comic situations. In the other novels being considered here the war is always kept at a respectable distance. The authors may take great pains to point out that the real war is not being denied and insist that it

is extraneous to their purpose which is to treat an isolated or aberrant situation.⁴⁵ But for the most part, "novels such as Mister Roberts and Don't Go Near the Water depend for their effect on a conspiracy between author and reader to deny violence and death. This seems to be the major proviso before war can respectably be made a subject of amusement."⁴⁶

Such is not the case with Catch-22. It never fails to take itself, and the war, seriously. In this sense it is a mistake to see the novel as being intrinsically humorous. Because of this serious intent the novel also invites comparison with the war-writing of

⁴⁵I should like to note here that I do not wish to dismiss as totally irrelevant the "comic" novels mentioned here. Even though their attempts to come to terms--usually parenthetically--with the real war very often reach no higher than a low plane of sentimentality (cf. Captain Newman, M.D., pp. 271-72), the hero of Mister Roberts, whose knowledge of war is "straight from Life" is still able to perceive that "no one gave a hoot in hell what went on beyond the confines of this ship." And he can plead that "if the dead of this war must have a mutual encomium, then let it be 'poor dead bastards'." There is at least a little humanity in that. And let us not say of them, this time, 'they gave their lives' for something or other; for certainly there was nothing voluntary in their dying." Thus it may be said of Catch-22 that it not only exploits the humor of these novels but keeps up and develops the cynicism toward war rhetoric which had been handed down from the writers of World War I and which the writers of the comic novels did not, in any significant way, continue.

⁴⁶Payne, p. 41.

novelists such as Jones and Mailer. The English novelist, John Wain, hints at this when he says of Catch-22:

Most of it is pitched in the key of a bitterly exuberant farce, a farce through which fear and ennui are always perceptible. But now and again the custard-pies are quietly laid aside, and we are given a deadly serious passage which proves that Mr. Heller, if he had wanted to, could have written a Jones or a Mailer into the ground.⁴⁷

It is the contention in what follows that Heller not only tried to do exactly this, but succeeded in doing it.

iii. The sound of a different drummer.

Joseph J. Waldmeir, in his attempt to come to terms with the war novel sub-genre, found that even when he limited himself to novels of combat written by or about Americans in the second World War he was still faced with some two hundred and fifty novels; all of which were "implicitly or explicitly pro-war novels."⁴⁸ The present study is not meant to be a study of the war novel per se so it is not necessary to come to terms fully with Waldmeir's claim. My purpose here is to consider certain aspects of the sub-genre in relation to Catch-22. In this context it becomes necessary to disagree with

⁴⁷John Wain, "A New Novel About Old Troubles," The Critical Quarterly (Summer 1963), p. 168.

⁴⁸Joseph J. Waldmeir, American Novels of the Second World War (1968), pp. 9-10.

Waldmeir; certainly, Catch-22 is not a pro-war novel.

However, if one takes James Jones, Norman Mailer, John Horne Burns, and Anton Myrer as representative novelists among those who have written--and written well--about the second World War Waldmeir's statement may be seen to carry much that is correct. These writers, not unlike the writers of the first World War who found themselves caught between rhetoric and fact, have strong feelings about the particulars of war and combat, but for the most part they accept the necessity of the war as a phenomenon. The Nazi-Fascist threat was the deciding factor in the "acceptance" of this war. Whatever else may be said the necessity of resisting such a threat was never questioned. The novels focussed on "the ideological issues in the war, and focussed on its political, moral, and ethical causes and consequences."⁴⁹ And because of this, because these better novelists did not come to grips with the issue which is war itself, they

establish a rapport with the great body of lesser war material by perpetuating several of the "sacred cows" which characterize it. The qualified anti-war statement which enters peripherally into each novel becomes vitiated by the mass of predictable, "naturalistic" war reporting, the minute detail of geography and topography, the lurid inventories of the wounds, the blood,⁵⁰ gangrene and malaria, the stink of corpses.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 10.

⁵⁰Payne, p. 52.

Because of this such novels, paradoxically, tend in the final analysis to glorify war. The war becomes a learning experience through which the individual "finds himself" and comes to terms with his environment. The concepts of the heroic, even the noble, of sacrifice, of "fighting the good fight" are retained within the war context. Such is not the case with Catch-22. Several points already made above have relevance here as well. By reversing the traditional roles of the coward and the hero and equating these with sanity and madness, respectively, Heller creates a situation whereby the traditional values are totally deflated. In Heller's novel these traditional values can only be accepted if one is willing to grant a more fundamental premise; that the lunatics--as he defines them--have a mandate to inherit the earth. These values exist in the novel but they belong to the guardians of catch-22. Through a perverse logic it is these values which form the foundation upon which the world of Pianosa exists. These values have become, in the context of Catch-22, Milo's faith in the sanctity of a business contract, Cathcart's faith in a tight bombing pattern, Havermeyer's devotion to duty, and Natelly's faith in the value of dying for one's country. To grant that Catch-22 is a pro-war novel⁵¹ one must be prepared to make a value

⁵¹Waldmeir, p. 165.

judgement which gives Cathcart a right to do anything which he cannot be prevented from doing. This can only be accomplished by seeing Yossarian as the lunatic in a world of sane men. It cannot be denied that this is possible; rationalization is capable of many things.

Heller's treatment of the stereotyped motifs found in the "comic" war novel has already been considered. The "straight" war novels have their stereotyped routines as well. Furthermore, such novels never take themselves more seriously than when they are dealing in these archetypal situations. Heller exploits the "comic" war novel by continually forcing the comic situations into the realm of the grotesque. Likewise, through parody and satire, Heller exploits the "straight" war novels by creating absurd parodies of their most serious intentions. The result is that by deflating the stereotyped situations Heller deflates the philosophic premise upon which these novels depend.

In his consideration of some of the "sacred cows" of this type, Payne points out that

Among other things, these books tell us that servicemen occupy their time between battles by falling in love, that the "million dollar wound" is a coveted passport to safety, that the doctors and medics strive manfully to stem the flow of blood, and that the wives at home must suffer too.⁵²

⁵²Payne, p. 54.

Consider, in relation to these, such items in Catch-22 as: Nately's love affair with his whore, Yossarian's liver complaint and the Chaplain's "Wisconsin shingles", the action and attitudes of Gus, Wes, and Doc Daneeka, and the actions of Mrs. Daneeka when she learns of the "death" of her husband.

Speaking generally of the novels of the second World War, Malcolm Cowley states that there is more sex than love in these novels and the usual explanation is that this is due simply to the stress of war.⁵³ Applied to Catch-22 this would be an understatement. By way of illustration one might consider a scene not from a novel of the second World War but from the classic by the man of war himself, and compare this to a scene which, in its situational aspects at least, is also found in Catch-22. I am thinking of the love affair between Catherine Barkley and Frederick Henry in A Farewell to Arms and that of Nurse Duckett and Yossarian in Catch-22. In particular one can refer to two scenes, one from each novel, both of which are sexual and both of which occur in a hospital.

Catherine visits Frederick Henry in hospital where they make brief and passionate, but meaningful, love.

Afterwards:

⁵³Malcolm Cowley, in Modern American Fiction, p. 303.

Catherine sat in a chair by the bed. The door was open into the hall. The wildness was gone and I felt finer than I had ever felt.

She asked, "Now do you believe I love you?"

"Oh, you're lovely," I said. "You've got to stay. They can't send you away. I'm crazy in love with you."

"We'll have to be awfully careful. That was just madness. We can't do that."

"We can at night."

"We'll have to be awfully careful. You'll have to be careful in front of other people."

"I will."

"You'll have to be. You're sweet. You do love me, don't you?"

"Don't say that again. You don't know what that does to me."

"I'll be careful then. I don't want to do anything more to you. I have to go now, darling, really." ...

She went out. God knows I had not wanted to fall in love with her. I had not wanted to fall in love with any one. But God knows I had and I lay on the bed in the room of the hospital in Milan and all sorts of things went through my head but I felt wonderful....⁵⁴

All the expectations are here; the ambience of the young man "on the make" who finds himself being drawn into a commitment, the young girl looking for "love" but willing to compromise, the tender kiss, the beating hearts, the glimmer of meaning amidst the nothingness of war. "I thought I had never seen anyone so beautiful," is Frederick Henry's comment when he first sees Catherine enter his room.

Yossarian tells us, on the other hand, that Nurse Sue Ann Duckett "was a tall, spare, mature, straight-backed

⁵⁴ Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms, pp. 92-3.

woman with a prominent, well-rounded ass, small breasts and angular, ascetic New England features that came equally close to being very lovely and very plain."⁵⁵

And one morning, while she attends Yossarian in his hospital bed

he slipped his hand stealthily into the narrow space between her knees and, all at once, brought it up swiftly under her dress as far as it would go. Nurse Duckett shrieked and jumped into the air a mile, but it wasn't high enough, and she squirmed and vaulted and seesawed back and forth on her divine fulcrum for almost a full fifteen seconds before she wiggled free finally and retreated frantically into the aisle with an ashen, trembling face. She backed away too far, and Dunbar, who had watched from the beginning, sprang forward on his bed without warning and flung both arms around her bosom from behind. Nurse Duckett let out another scream and twisted away, fleeing far enough from Dunbar for Yossarian to lunge forward and grab her by the snatch again. Nurse Duckett bounced out across the aisle once more like a ping-pong ball with legs. Dunbar was waiting, ready to pounce. She remembered him just in time and leaped aside. Dunbar missed completely and sailed by her over the bed to the floor, landing on his skull with a soggy, crunching thud that knocked him cold.⁵⁶

And that, in brief, is the love affair of Nurse Duckett and Captain Yossarian. But his longing continues and when he finds himself in Rome, separated from his beloved Sue Ann, it is more than he can stand.

⁵⁵ Catch-22, p. 288.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Yossarian missed Nurse Duckett so much that he went searching hungrily through the streets for Luciana, whose laugh and invisible scar he had never forgotten, or the boozy, blowzy, bleary-eyed floozy in the over-loaded white brassiere and unbuttoned orange satin blouse....He wanted Nurse Duckett with her dress up and her slim thighs bare to the hips. He banged a thin streetwalker with a wet cough who picked him up from an alley between hotels, but that was no fun at all and he hastened to the enlisted men's apartment for the fat, friendly maid in the lime-colored panties, who was overjoyed to see him but couldn't arouse him. He went to bed there early and slept alone. He woke up disappointed and banged a sassy, short, chubby girl he found in the apartment after breakfast, but that was only a little better, and he chased her away when he'd finished and went back to sleep. He napped till lunch and then went shopping for presents for Nurse Duckett and a scarf for the maid in the lime-colored panties, who hugged him with such gargantuan gratitude that he was soon hot for Nurse Duckett and ran looking lecherously for Luciana again.⁵⁷

The frenzied pace of the narrative, keeping time with Yossarian's frantic search, and the nonchalant vulgarization of sexual activity has the result of not only removing even the barest concept of love but dehumanizing sexual activity until it becomes a parallel with the frenzy involved in Milo's work for his syndicate and Cathcart's raising the number of required bombing missions. Every activity becomes part of the paranoia associated with war.

The motif of an American soldier who falls in love with a foreign girl so impressed Malcolm Cowley that he

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 345.

counted the romantic or tragic love stories in ten of these earlier books. Of the affairs that go beyond the category of merely Having Sex, there are four with Italians, two with Germans... two with Frenchwomen... one with a Tonkinese, one with a New Zealander, and one with a Japanese "just like Madame Buttercup in the movies."⁵⁸

Such affairs have several things in common. The problems of cultural difference, racial prejudice, physical separation by battles, and other impediments caused by war form the warp and woof of these affairs. Quite often the plot turns on the problem of adjustment to "the American way" for the lady involved. Such is the case in John Horne Burns' The Gallery (1947) where Guilia's American Captain

began to lecture her on her adjustments to American life. He told her sadly that to be happy as his wife in America she must convert her personality. He said she was too utterly dependent on him. That an American wife was something quite different from an Italian wife, shut up in the house with her children.⁵⁹

And yet it is this fact that saddens him, for in Guilia he sees something that the American housewife is not. He tells her sadly, "You're everything that women have always insisted that they were, yet rarely succeeded in being. I wonder if in America you could stay that way."⁶⁰

⁵⁸Malcolm Cowley, in Modern American Fiction, p. 303.

⁵⁹John Horne Burns, The Gallery (1970), p. 277.

⁶⁰Ibid.

Lieutenant Nately has no such misgivings. He is certain that he, his girl, and her little sister make a wonderful family group. "The little girl would go to college when she was old enough, to Smith or Radcliffe or Bryn Mawr--he would see to that."⁶¹ There is, of course, one slight problem. Nately's girl is an incorrigible whore and her younger sister is an eager student of the profession as well. Nately, however, is not dismayed. When he rescues her from "the middle-aged military big shots holding her captive in a hotel because she would not say uncle,"⁶² she slept peacefully for eighteen hours and "when she woke up she was deeply in love with him. In the last analysis, that was all it took to win her heart--a good night's sleep."⁶³ She invites Nately to her bed where they are joined by the Kid Sister. When Nately hastens to tell his friends of his new love the girl adamantly refuses to get dressed before they arrive. The best that Nately can do under the circumstances is beg his buddies not to look at his girl when she is naked.

"Hey, you crazy or something?" Hungry Joe demanded of Nately. "The next thing you know you'll be trying to make her give up hustling."
 "From now on," Nately said to his girl, "I

⁶¹Catch-22, p. 350.

⁶²Ibid., p. 345.

⁶³Ibid., p. 350.

forbid you to go out hustling."

"Perche?" she inquired curiously.

"Perche?" he screamed with amazement.

"Because it's not nice, that's why!"

"Perche no?"

"Because it just isn't!" Nately insisted.

"It just isn't right for a nice girl like you to go looking for men to sleep with. I'll give you all the money you need, so you won't have to do it any more."

"And what will I do all day instead?"

"Do?" said Nately. "You'll do what all your friends do."

"My friends go looking for men to sleep with."

"Then get new friends! I don't even want you to associate with girls like that, anyway. Prostitution is bad! Everybody knows that, even him." He turned with confidence to the experienced old man. "Am I right?"

"You're wrong," answered the old man.

"Prostitution gives her an opportunity to meet people. It provides fresh air and wholesome exercise, and it keeps her out of trouble."⁶⁴

Lieutenant Nately, still caught in the logic of catch-22, is not convinced. The old man, however, because he has mastered the logic of survival knows he is right. The romantic or tragic potentialities which have traditionally been applied to love have been subjected here to the same reversals applied to honor and bravery which have already been discussed. Love, it seems, demands life; and when life is reduced to a question of survival in a world committee to death one takes what one can get on whatever terms offered. Not a very happy alternative, perhaps, but it is the only one available other than death.

⁶⁴Catch-22, pp. 351-52.

And death, of course, is a central issue. The words "Killed In Action" seldom fail to appear in these novels of war. This in itself is not a very surprising fact. What is noteworthy is that the words are never more intentionally contrived to create pathos and an overflow of sentiment than when they appear in the fateful letter or telegram announcing to those who "sit and wait" at home that a loved one has died for the cause. Such scenes traditionally become set pieces by which the novelist re-affirms our ebbing faith in all that is good, noble and just. We are once more reminded that despite the savagery, blood, death, gore, idiocy, atrocities, and nada to which we have been subjected--all has not been in vain. Such is the scene in Anton Myrer's The Big War when Andrea Kantaylis learns that her husband Danny has been killed. She is firm in her resolve:

"He [her baby son] will be as fine as Danny," she heard herself saying with an intensity that amazed her. "He will grow up to be even finer than Danny, with all his father's sweetness and strength and nobility...he will be the joy of all of us, the vindication of all of us," she finished fiercely. "And they won't have beaten us: they won't have won..."⁶⁵

Similarly, we learn that when Mrs. Daneeka is informed of her husband's "death" she "split the peaceful Staten Island night with woeful shrieks of lamentation."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Anton Myrer, The Big War (1965), p. 460.

⁶⁶ Catch-22, p. 335.

It is not given to her to know that her husband is still very much alive and that his "death" is simply a question of records. "The records show that you went up in McWatt's plane to collect some flight time. You didn't come down in a parachute, so you must have been killed in the crash,"⁶⁷ one of his helpers explains to him patiently.

Mrs. Daneeka is only just resigned to her tragic fate when she begins to receive letters from her husband, pleading that he is very much alive. She replies but her letters are returned unopened, stamped KILLED IN ACTION. In the meantime she receives notification that she is the sole beneficiary to several insurance policies amounting to a tidy sum. The husbands of her best friends begin to flirt with her and she has her hair dyed. All the while Doc Daneeka is fighting desperately to keep from being "disappeared."

There was nowhere else to turn but to his wife, and he scribbled an impassioned letter begging her to bring his plight to the attention of the War Department and urging her to communicate at once with his group commander, Colonel Cathcart, for assurances that--no matter what else she might have heard--it was indeed he, her husband, Doc Daneeka, who was pleading with her and not a corpse or some imposter. Mrs. Daneeka was stunned by the depth of emotion in the almost illegible appeal. She was torn with compunction and tempted to comply, but the very next letter she opened that day was from that same Colonel Cathcart, her husband's group commander, and began:

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Dear Mrs., Mr., Miss, or Mr. and Mrs. Daneeka:
Words cannot express the deep personal grief I
experienced when your husband, son, father or
brother was killed, wounded or reported missing
in action.

Mrs. Daneeka moved with her children to Lansing,
Michigan, and left no forwarding address.⁶⁸

In the world governed by the inexorable laws of catch-22,
like the world of Milo's syndicate, everyone is on the
take, everything, even death, has its price and everyone
has a share. To serve such a world is to relinquish the
self to an organization which eventually must eliminate
it. Against such an insane absolute the only alternative
to complete dehumanization is a resounding non serviam!

Such comparisons could be multiplied at great
length but this would lead only to redundancy. A more
important aspect of the novel which must be examined is
satire. The satiric quality of this novel, however,
deserves a more detailed treatment than the present context
will allow and will be considered more fully in a sub-
sequent chapter. There is still, however, one aspect of
the war theme which should be considered.

The treatment of war as a learning process is a
motif which can be traced back to Crane's The Red Badge of
Courage, up through A Farewell to Arms, to Harry Brown's
A Walk in the Sun, Jones's The Thin Red Line, and Wouk's

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 338.

The Caine Mutiny. Furthermore, it is not unusual for this learning process to be seen as a sort of journey to enlightenment which, quite often, has an objectified physical equivalent as well. Thus, the voyage of the "Caine" and the retreat from Caporetto may be seen as metaphors for the spiritual journeys being undertaken by Willie Keith and Frederick Henry.⁶⁹

Paulette Michel-Michot has argued for a similar motif in The Thin Red Line,⁷⁰ and Minna Doskow has placed Catch-22 in the same tradition.⁷¹ That Heller uses the motif is certainly true; what use he makes of it is a more involved question. Traditionally the learning process is seen as one of initiation; an initiation which ends in some form of acceptance. This is what Josh Greenfeld presumably has in mind when, in the course of what is on the whole a favorable comment on the novel, he concludes by imputing carelessness to Heller on the grounds that:

to structure an anti-war novel upon a base implicitly requiring one to view war as a learning process or a game is a mistake, for it is to fall into a trap that leads to the glamorization of war itself.⁷²

⁶⁹Payne, p. 55.

⁷⁰"Jones's The Thin Red Line: The End of Innocence," Revue Des Langues Vivantes, 30 (1962), pp. 15-26.

⁷¹"The Night Journey in Catch-22," Twentieth Century Literature (January, 1967), pp. 186-193.

⁷²"22 Was Funnier than 14," The New York Times Book Review (March 3, 1968), p. 53.

As a general statement on the novel this is incredibly inane. It does not seem to admit the positive value of learning a negative truth. In other words, the protagonist who learns during the course of a war novel that war is unqualified insanity surely does not by this knowledge cause the novel to become a "glamorization of war itself." What Greenfield is condemning, presumably, is the type of learning process which enables a soldier to learn to "live with fear," to overcome "cowardice," to put aside his naive innocence and become a "good soldier," to become a "do or die" machine who, on Hemingway's advice, has suspended his imagination. He is condemning the type of novel designed to show that war "makes a man out of you." Greenfield's mistake is thinking that Catch-22 is such a novel. As Sanford Pinsker points out, "the key to the attitudes found in Catch-22 is not initiation, but survival."⁷³

Unfortunately, in the next sentence, Pinsker contradicts the truth of his own remark when he continues by saying that:

Yossarian not only refuses the traditional journey of learning in manhood, but adopts the attitude of a perennial innocent.⁷⁴

⁷³"Heller's Catch-22: The Protest of a Puer Eternis," Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction, 7:2 (1964-65), p. 151.

⁷⁴Ibid.

Minna Doskow, in an attempt to refute Pinsker, creates a category which Yossarian cannot, indeed should not, support. Hers is a good argument, but she fails to see the continuity in Yossarian's actions and draws a weak conclusion. She says:

Although Yossarian may be innocent, as Mr. Pinsker claims, at the beginning of the novel, and his belief that he can work within the establishment using their rules for his own ends is incredibly naive, he does, I believe, learn better, and after his symbolic journey to the underworld, represented by his trip through the dark streets of Rome, he comes to a new recognition of the meaning of his experience and reaches a new knowledge in the hospital after his near death, achieving what one could perhaps call an informed innocence.⁷⁵

The confusion here rests on a failure to come to terms with the time scheme of the novel and to understand what happens--or, more precisely, what does not happen--to Yossarian in the novel. This is Greenfield's problem when he says that "Yossarian learns the hard way what a more substantial character might have started out knowing."⁷⁶ But what is it that Greenfield would like for Yossarian to know? "It is, in fact, Heller's argument."⁷⁷ But it is hardly correct to speak of Yossarian as

⁷⁵ Twentieth Century Literature (January, 1967), p. 186.

⁷⁶ The New York Times Book Review (March 3, 1968), p. 53.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

learning; it is much more a question of his proving. Yossarian does know from the beginning what Heller's argument and his own position is; he learns nothing new in any substantial sense and the novel is no more or less than proof of his position. This is not to say, however, that Yossarian is a static character. His attempts to explore various options throughout the novel are as much aimed at disproving his conclusion--that he is a sane man surrounded by the insane and that his main objective is to save his life--as they are aimed at proving it. What happens toward the end of the novel--where the narrative returns to strict chronology--is that, given the logic of catch-22, his original assessment of his situation becomes finally, totally, clear. Having accepted this he consciously acts in a fashion which is perfectly consistent with the unconscious logic of his behavior all through the novel.

Yossarian certainly does refuse the "traditional journey of learning in manhood." That way lies death. The key word here is "traditional." The traditional definition of manhood allows little room for the coward and Yossarian is nothing if not a confirmed coward. The only times he might be said to accept this role is when, "in a moment of weakness,"⁷⁸ he accepts the "odious" deal

⁷⁸Catch-22, p. 431.

offered by Cathcart and Korn, when he accepts Dobbs's plan to murder Cathcart, and when he straps on a gun and refuses to fly any more missions. He is a man, but a man on his own terms. But neither is it correct to see Yossarian as the "perennial" or the "informed" innocent. He is totally aware. The proof of this can be seen from the fact that both Nately and Snowden (innocence and purity) are dead by the time we get to the end of the novel; Yossarian is still very much alive. On his own terms he is just as cunning as Milo and just as adept at staying alive as Milo is at creating an international cartel.

Both Pinsker and Doskow see Yossarian as being naive and innocent and attempting to work within the system "in the beginning." But when is the beginning? The first chapter of the novel opens almost directly in the middle of the action with which it is concerned. When we meet Yossarian in the hospital for the first time the missions have already been raised to forty-five. On the second page of the novel we learn that Yossarian had "made up his mind to spend the rest of the war in hospital."⁷⁹ When we arrive at the last pages of the novel Yossarian is in hospital again. Having left the hospital in the early chapters he returns to the war where, by living according

⁷⁹Catch-22, p. 8.

to the logic of survival, he manages to get back to the hospital the last time--still alive. When he leaves now he vows: "I'll keep on my toes every minute,"⁸⁰ (the logic of survival again) and goes, not back to the war, but to begin his escape to Sweden via Rome where he intends to search out and try to help the Kid Sister of Nately's Whore. Both actions are extensions of the same frame of mind. Yet they are qualitatively different. He has confirmed what he has suspected all along--not because of being caught up in war, but in spite of it.

It is the failure on the part of the critics to grasp the qualitative difference between the two actions that has caused almost every commentator on the novel to reject the ending. Those who do not reject it simply refuse to come to terms with it or attempt to defend it in such a way as to invalidate the novel. It is here that the time scheme of the novel becomes so important. The ending of Catch-22 is contained in chapters thirty-four through forty-two inclusive. And these chapters are narrated in strict chronological order--with the exception of the final account of Snowden's death. A brief summary of the action contained in these chapters is necessary.

After the Thanksgiving celebrations Yossarian and his friends end up in hospital. The Soldier in White

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 442.

appears and Dunbar is "disappeared". It now appears that Natelly will be sent home but he does not wish to go as this would separate him from his whore. Yossarian goes to Milo to intercede and Milo goes to Cathcart. The result is that the missions are raised to eighty so that the men in the squadron can fly Milo's missions for him.

Yossarian is duped into flying his seventy-first mission, the mission to La Spezia, where Dobbs and Natelly, along with ten others, are killed.

Shortly after this the chaplain is arrested and questioned. All the forces of catch-22 merge. Scheisskopf is promoted to Lieutenant General in charge of Special Services, which now includes combat operations as well.

At this point Yossarian makes his final refusal to fly any more missions. Because he is becoming an embarrassment to his superiors he is sent to Rome on leave. When he breaks the news of Natelly's death to Natelly's Whore she attacks him so violently he has to flee back to Pianosa, where he finds her waiting for his plane. At last they parachute her over enemy territory. As a result of his rebellion Yossarian becomes a focus for the discontent of the other men in the squadron, who pop up at night to wish him well and offer him encouragement. When he learns that all the girls have been put out of the whorehouse presided over by the old man, he goes absent without official leave to Rome in search of Natelly's Whore's Kid Sister. Milo promises

to help him locate the child but gets diverted in a search for illegal tobacco profits.

Yossarian wanders through "The Eternal City" and is finally arrested for being in Rome without a pass while Aarfy, who has just raped and murdered a servant girl receives an apology from the police for the disturbance they cause by entering the room. He is returned to Pianosa where he is offered the "odious" deal. He is told he will be sent home as a hero on condition that he agrees to spread favorable propaganda concerning Cathcart and Korn. He accepts. He leaves Cathcart's office; is stabbed by Nately's whore; spends an anesthetized period in hospital; comes to his senses and rejects the deal.

He is almost at a point of accepting his fate when he learns that Orr has not been killed but has made good his escape to Sweden. With renewed hope he decides to desert and head for Sweden as well--with a short stop in Rome to try to rescue Nately's Whore's Kid Sister.

In all of this the main point of contention seems to be Yossarian's supposed justification of the war and his own role in it. This occurs in the course of a conversation between Danby and Yossarian just before he deserts. It is necessary to consider this conversation, not only in itself, but within the context of all the actions just summarized. Danby reminds Yossarian of his responsibility to his country and the special nature of this particular war.

"This is not World War One. You must never forget that we're at war with aggressors who would not let either one of us live if they won."

"I know that," Yossarian replied tersely, with a sudden surge of scowling annoyance. "Christ, Danby, I earned that medal I got, no matter what their reasons were for giving it to me. I've flown seventy goddam combat missions. Don't talk to me about fighting to save my country. I've been fighting all along to save my country. Now I'm going to fight a little to save myself. The country's not in danger any more, but I am."

"The war's not over yet. The Germans are driving toward Antwerp."

"The Germans will be beaten in a few months. And Japan will be beaten a few months after that. If I were to give up my life now, it wouldn't be for my country. It would be for Cathcart and Korn. So I'm turning my bombsight in for the duration. From now on I'm thinking only of me."⁸¹

Even Robert Brustein, whose review of the novel is one of the best, says of this that it is "an inspirational sequence which is the weakest thing in the book."⁸² And Joseph Waldmeir takes the argument even further when he says:

The scene comes as a shocking surprise. It represents a reversal of intention almost as flagrant as Wouk's in The Caine Mutiny. There is nothing wrong with an American novelist being in favor of the war; Heller would in fact, as suggested above, be unique if he opposed it. But since he appears to be opposed to it throughout the novel, there is something wrong with Yossarian, his victim-spokesman, expressing pro-war sentiments, weak and unconvincing though they might be. One might forgive the sequence if he could see it as even moderately integral, if the novel had prepared the way for it. But such is

⁸¹ Catch-22, pp. 435-36.

⁸² New Republic (November 13, 1961), p. 13.

not the case; the sequence is not added up to, it is simply added on.⁸³

Both contentions, that this is pro-war and not integral to the novel, are based on flagrant misreadings of the novel and a total misunderstanding of Heller's intentions. But the charges cannot be answered by attempting to give the scene a direction it will not support. This is Karl's problem when he says:

When Yossarian strikes for freedom at the end of the novel...his act symbolizes more than defiance, certainly not cowardice. He has done his duty-- Heller is careful to keep before us Yossarian's many missions (the word itself indicates a high calling). He has shown his responsibility to society at large, and has given his physical energy and his nervous sweat. Now he must seek a meaningful life, try to make order out of chaos.⁸⁴

Only the first and the last sentence in this statement come close to being correct. The rest is based on the same misconception which lies behind the remarks of both Brustein and Waldmeir. This misconception is that this statement by Yossarian has anything to do with his final decision to flee to Sweden. They are not so much a justification of what he intends as a confession of what he has done. They are the words of a beaten man; the words of a man who has already decided that there is "no

⁸³Waldmeir, p. 165.

⁸⁴Frederick R. Karl, "Joseph Heller's Catch-22: Only Fools Walk in Darkness," Contemporary American Novelists, ed. Harry T. More (1968), p. 138.

hope at all."⁸⁵ These words are spoken by Yossarian at a time when he reaches the lowest point to which he descends in the novel. They are an expression of total nausea; an admission of defeat.

To see this point clearly it is necessary to consider again the difference between his first leaving the hospital and the leaving of it for the last time. In fact, it becomes necessary to see his final act as qualitatively different from every other act--save one--which Yossarian performs in the novel. It has already been demonstrated that Yossarian's prime concern throughout the novel has been staying alive. What causes him to reach the point of "no hope" is that he has equated staying alive with saving his life. He has equated survival with existence.

The failure to see this difference is what has caused so many critics to view Yossarian's role as that of a naive innocent trying to work "within the system." Such is not the case at all. Throughout the novel Yossarian has been concerned with the system only to the degree that he saw it as a threat to his survival. This is not his position at the end. This may seem, at first glance, to conflict with the point already made that the war, for

⁸⁵Catch-22, p. 438.

Yossarian, is not a journey to enlightenment. This is not so. To say that Yossarian applies what he knows in a different way is not to say that he learns anything radically new during the course of the novel. He is, when he breaks for Sweden, a regenerated man, but only because he has finally managed to apply the message passed on by Snowden and Orr. To fail to recognize this change in Yossarian is to fail to come to terms with the novel. Such is Karl's problem when he says:

What keeps Yossarian comic, however, is the fact that he never tries to change the society he scorns; he is quite willing to accept its absurdity if it will leave him alone. Never a revolutionary, rarely a rebel, unintentionally a hero, only occasionally a young Turk, Yossarian is more often a rank conformist. The only sanity he desires is his own, not the world's; the only joys he seeks are those he can himself generate; the only rewards he covets are the compensations, not of glory, but of full lips, breasts, and thighs.⁸⁶

All of this is true but it is shallow and underestimates the essence of Yossarian's concern. On the surface this is the image of Yossarian, but it is not representative of his true character.

This image is partially true of Yossarian for most of the novel; but, it must be remembered, most of the novel is concerned with where Yossarian has been, not with where he is or where he is going. This image is more a description of Dunbar than Yossarian. Dunbar does not attempt to fight

⁸⁶Karl, p. 139.

the system, he merely actively cultivates boredom in the hope that somehow he can survive. The result is that he is "disappeared". And such would have been Yossarian's fate as well if it were not for the fact that he understands in time the legacy of Snowden and Orr.

As stated above, Yossarian's break for Sweden via Rome is qualitatively different from every other action he performs--save one. This one other action is his first attempt to save Natelly's Whore's Kid Sister. What makes this act different is that when he goes absent without official leave to Rome to rescue the child he is, for the first time, risking his own survival willingly. He is attempting to make a commitment to something outside himself. He is attempting to particularize his concern as, in his decision to murder Cathcart and the carrying of the gun, he had attempted to particularize his revolt.

Before this he has been careful not to make his opposition definable. He has continually jostled at abstracts. "Everyone is trying to kill me," he is fond of repeating. But he has refused to name a particular culprit or to attempt a definite, positive stance. This is why he twice refuses to lend his blessing to Dobbs's plan to murder Cathcart. Like the children in Golding's Lord of the Flies, he refuses to "name the beast." On this occasion he attempts to give a positive direction to

his discontent and his revolt by taking a stand. He cannot, at this point, accept the fact that he must remain powerless in the face of absurdity. On the flight to Rome, against a background of Milo's prattle, he analyzes this problem of committed action outside the self.

Nately's whore was on his mind, as were Kraft and Orr and Nately and Dunbar, and Kid Sampson and McWatt, and all the poor and stupid and diseased people he had seen in Italy, Egypt and North Africa and knew about in other areas of the world, and Snowden and Nately's whore's kid sister were on his conscience, too. Yossarian thought he knew why Nately's whore held him responsible for Nately's death and wanted to kill him. Why the hell shouldn't she? It was a man's world, and she and everyone younger had every right to blame him and everyone older for every unnatural tragedy that befell them; just as she, even in her grief, was to blame for every man-made misery that landed on her kid sister and on all other children behind her. Someone had to do something sometime. Every victim was a culprit, every culprit a victim, and somebody had to stand up sometime to try to break the lousy chain of inherited habit that was imperiling them all.⁸⁷

Noble sentiments these, but, like Hamlet, Yossarian will find that idea and action demand quite different responses. "The Eternal City" proves an apt testing ground.

Every critic has pointed out the importance of Chapter XXXIX: "The Eternal City." But its final importance is that the actions witnessed here crush every spark of hope Yossarian has mustered. All the images in this chapter can be reduced to those of totally ineffectual, suspended, absurd action--the man beating the dog, the man beating

⁸⁷ Catch-22, p. 396-97. (The italics are mine.)

the boy, the soldiers lifting the sick comrade from the sidewalk to the car and back to the sidewalk--and totally brutal force. It is the latter which is the strongest manifestation of catch-22 in the novel, given graphic significance in the image of the man calling "Help! Police!" while policemen with clubs beat him mercilessly. It is within this context that Yossarian is put to the test and fails.

Yossarian smiled wryly at the futile and ridiculous cry for aid, then saw with a start that the words were ambiguous, realized with alarm that they were not, perhaps, intended as a call for police but a heroic warning from the grave by a doomed friend to everyone who was not a policeman with a club and a gun and a mob of other policemen with clubs and guns to back him up. "Help! Police!" the man cried, and he could have been shouting of danger. Yossarian responded to the thought by slipping away stealthily from the police and almost tripped over the feet of a burly woman of forty hastening across the intersection guiltily, darting furtive, vindictive glances behind her toward a woman of eighty with thick, bandaged ankles doddering after her in a losing pursuit. The old woman was gasping for breath as she minced along and muttering to herself in distracted agitation. There was no mistaking the nature of the scene; it was a chase. The triumphant first woman was halfway across the wide avenue before the second woman reached the curb. The nasty, small, gloating smile with which she glanced back at the laboring old woman was both wicked and apprehensive. Yossarian knew he could help the troubled old woman if she would only cry out, knew he could spring forward and capture the sturdy first woman and hold her for the mob of policemen nearby if the second woman would only give him license with a shriek of distress. But the old woman passed by

without even seeing him, mumbling in terrible, tragic vexation, and soon the first woman had vanished into the deepening layers of darkness and the old woman was left standing helplessly in the center of the thoroughfare, dazed, uncertain which way to proceed, alone. Yossarian tore his eyes from her and hurried away in shame because he had done nothing to assist her.⁸⁸

Knowing what he does about culprits and victims, Yossarian can no longer refuse to admit to which side he belongs. Even the old man, he learns, has been killed. He finds this difficult to believe at first. "But of course he knew it was true, knew it was logical and true: once again the old man had marched along with the majority."⁸⁹ Having concluded that "mobs with clubs were in control everywhere,"⁹⁰ he must now admit that catch-22 has triumphed and he has lost. But in realizing this he also realizes why he has failed...

Catch-22 did not exist, he was positive of that, but it made no difference. What did matter was that everyone thought it existed, and that was much worse, for there was no object or text to ridicule or refute, to accuse, criticize, attack, amend, hate, revile, spit at, rip to shreds, trample upon or burn up.⁹¹

He has failed because he, too, has accepted the catch.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 406-07.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 399.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 407.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 400.

In a last frantic effort to save himself from total despair he rushes to find Michaela, the plain, simple-minded maid in the officers' quarters "whom none of the men had ever slept with."⁹² He finds only her mangled body on the street. Aarfy has raped and murdered her. Aarfy's blasé attitude shocks him and he yells, "Stupid! Don't you realize what you've done?...You've murdered a human being. They are going to put you in jail. They might even hang you!"⁹³ He should of course know better, but his spirits rise when he hears sirens approaching. The military police arrive and arrest him "for being in Rome without a pass. They apologized to Aarfy for intruding and led Yossarian away."⁹⁴

He has lost and catch-22 has won. He knows that now, so he accepts the "odious deal" when it is offered to him by Cathcart and Korn. It is not that he wants to; there is simply no point in not doing so. Proof of his image of himself can be gained from the fact that he tells them: "My friends call me Yo-Yo." Not only is this an apt image of the puppet he has become but it is a name he has always despised.

⁹²Ibid., p. 408.

⁹³Ibid., p. 409.

⁹⁴Ibid.

In the hospital as a result of the wound inflicted by Nately's whore, He has visions--while anesthetized--of a phantom visitor who keeps repeating, "We've got your pal, buddy, We've got your pal."⁹⁵ He decides to reject the "odious deal" and in the same context he remembers Snowden's death, and we finally learn all the circumstances surrounding his death. At last Yossarian verbalizes the secret he has shared with Snowden. He has known it all along but now he can fathom its significance. Because he can, the deal becomes impossible:

It was easy to read the message in his entrails.
 Man was matter, that was Snowden's secret.
 Drop him out a window and he'll fall. Set fire
 to him and he'll burn. Bury him and he'll rot,
 like other kinds of garbage. The spirit gone,
 man is garbage. That was Snowden's secret.
 Ripeness was all.⁹⁶

The reference to King Lear is deliberate. Acceptance of the deal would reduce him to matter. He may not be able to help the living--including himself--but he cannot betray the dead, not because they are the dead, but because they are the victims. And now that he knows the difference, he must side with the victims, not the culprits. "Goddammit, Danby! I've got friends who were killed in this war. I can't make a deal now."⁹⁷ And, indeed, his

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 422.

⁹⁶Ibid., pp. 429-30.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 437.

friends are all dead: Natelly, Dunbar, Clevinger, Dobbs, Kid Sampson, McWatt, Hungry Joe, and Orr--or so he believes. But it goes deeper than that. "Christ, Chaplain! Can you imagine that for a sin? Saving Colonel Cathcart's life! That's one crime I don't want on my record."⁹⁸

He is caught in an iron-clad dilemma: catch-22. He cannot accept the deal; Snowden's secret prevents that. But, "with mobs with guns in control everywhere" there is no escape either. He has rejected any hope for positive action. He names his two alternatives: "fly more missions" or "desert and let them catch me."⁹⁹ And it is within this context, in this frame of mind, that Yossarian supposedly offers what Waldmeir calls his justification of war. But it is not a justification; it is a confession. For just before the passage to which Waldmeir and Brustein refer he tells Danby:

"When I look up, I see people cashing in. I don't see heaven or saints or angels. I see people cashing in on every decent impulse and every human tragedy."

"But you must try not to think of that," Major Danby insisted. "And you must try not to let it upset you."

"Oh, it doesn't really upset me. What does upset me, though, is that they think I'm a sucker. They think that they're smart, and that the rest of us are dumb. And, you know, Danby, the thought occurs to me right now, for the first time, that maybe they're right."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 424.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 435.

So the medal becomes proof of his own stupidity. Proof that he has been a sucker. Proof that he, too, has been both culprit and victim. Proof that he has survived only to reach a point of no hope. No more. But there is more, much more. Orr has made it to Sweden, not by accident but because he planned it that way. Orr's message has become clear. "Danby, you dope! There is hope, after all. Can't you see? Even Clevinger might be alive somewhere in that cloud of his, hiding inside until it's safe to come out."¹⁰¹ He realizes at last that while it may not be possible to save the world--or, in this case, stop the war--one need not become its victim. Having realized this he acts.

I have limited this discussion to a refutation of Yossarian's supposed justification of the war. The significance of these actions will be dealt with more fully at the end of chapter III where the nature of action in an Absurd world will be considered in the light of Yossarian's character and final decision.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 439.

CHAPTER III

CATCH-22 AS A NOVEL

1. "Why do you blame the mirror?"

A process of extension and amplification may be used to re-apply several conclusions drawn in the preceding chapter to a less qualified discussion of Catch-22. It has been the contention of that chapter that while Catch-22 may be considered within the limited context of the war novel sub-genre the novel must be seen as being qualitatively different from this type in every instance. This is not to make a case for Catch-22 as the 'super war novel.' On the contrary, the intention has been to prove that because the novel goes so far beyond the narrow peculiarities of that type, no discussion of it within this context alone could prove worthy of the novel's merits. Because Heller refines the typical idiosyncratic modes of this type to such a degree that the archetypes pale by comparison, the novel demands a wider consideration within the context of the genre to which it legitimately belongs, that of the novel per se.

A pattern may be used here similar to that used in the former discussion. The attitude of Pinsker and others that the novel "does not seem to fit into the pattern of

the conventional war novel,"¹ need not preclude a discussion of the novel within that context, as I have already shown. Similarly, Pinsker's claim that "severely analytical criticism might also be unnecessary,"² in any discussion of Catch-22 should not preclude a consideration of the book as a novel. Yet a refusal to do exactly this seems to characterize much of the criticism, both favorable and adverse, which has appeared. There appears to be an attitude that because Catch-22 does not seem to fit into the traditional categories assigned to the novel, any consideration of it in relation to these categories can only be detrimental. Such a view has provided the novel's detractors with a definite advantage.

Both the novel's detractors and its admirers seem to have adopted a Procrustean approach to it. The detractors proceed to create a predetermined definition of the novel and then go on to dismiss the book on the grounds that it does not adhere to the definition which they have created. The anonymous reviewer for Daedalus may be cited as an example of this type, when he says that "since books not worth reading are not worth reviewing and Catch-22 is worthless, my review needs

¹Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction, 7:2 (1964-65), p. 150.

²Ibid.

justification."³ The 'justification' offered is that the novel is in effect a 'non-novel' because it breaks all the rules and in the final analysis is not very nice.

Alex Cockburn follows a similar line of reasoning when he decides that no one novel should mix parody and satire. Heller's use of both in the same novel apparently confuses him. He cannot decide whether Heller is "parodying what he considers to be false or initially overstated, or satirizing towards what he considers to be the truth."⁴ As a result of his confusion he dismisses the novel because, as he sees it, "this is a central ambiguity, one that ultimately becomes disturbing and dissipates the effect of the book."⁵ In effect he blames Heller for his own lack of perception. Constance Denniston creates a similar limitation for the novel. Hers is a very good, and positive, treatment but she is content to see Catch-22 as no more than a romance-parody.⁶ Being content with this, she does not come to terms with the several other genres which are parodied or with the

³(Winter, 1963), p. 155.

⁴New Left Review, (January-February, 1963), p. 90.

⁵Ibid.

⁶"The American Romance-Parody: A Study of Purdy's Malcolm and Heller's Catch-22," Emporia State Research Studies, 14:2 (1965), pp. 42ff.

fact that the novel contains parody and satire not only of fictional forms and literary modes but of the essence of twentieth century existence as well.

Most critics of the novel have been so stunned by its catastrophic vision, its alternating between wild laughter and deadly shock, its fusion of styles and techniques, that they have preferred to dismiss it rather than attempt the "virtuoso performance" which Mailer considered would be necessary "to write a definite piece on Catch-22." Such an attitude is expressed by Granville Hicks when he says of Catch-22 that "in general, the book is too complicated to be comprehended."⁷ The opposite approach is taken by Joseph Waldmeir when he contends that "a close reading of the text in terms of texture and tone reveals only that its complexity is superficial, that its variety is only apparent, and that its apparent repetitiveness is unfortunately all too real."⁸

Some critics, not wishing to dismiss the novel but not knowing quite what to make of it, try to excuse what they consider to be its faults by over-stating the case for what they consider to be its strong points. Sanford Pinsker, apparently fascinated by Heller's approach

⁷"Medals for Madness," Saturday Review (October 14, 1961), p. 32.

⁸"Two Novelists of the Absurd: Heller and Kesey," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 5:3 (1964), p. 192.

to his subject, contents himself by stating that, "if Catch-22 is singularly lacking in philosophic content of any depth, it makes up for it in style."⁹

Douglas Day attempts to summarize this critical confusion when he writes that the novel, in the last analysis, defies classification:

It seems poorly edited, repetitive, and overlong. It is hopelessly confused in mood, shifting irrationally and irresponsibly from sneering cynicism to the most banal kind of sentimentality (how trite to write a novel the major premise of which is that killing is bad and that we ought to love one another!) from the rawest and most explicit realism to mad flights of surrealism. Most critics of fiction will be unable to classify Catch-22, so they will probably end by scorning it.¹⁰

This comment is borne out by the reviewer for Time who claimed the novel suffers from an "overdose of comic nonsequitur," and possesses an "almost experimental formlessness."¹¹ William Barrett, who, apparently, has very definite notions about the range and use of humor, felt that Heller did not "have to try so hard to be funny,"¹² while Spencer Klaw considered the novel "too

⁹Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction, 7:2 (1964-65), p. 152.

¹⁰Carolina Quarterly, 15:3 (Summer, 1963), p. 87.

¹¹"Good Soldier Yossarian," (October 27, 1961), p. 98.

¹²"Two Newcomers," Atlantic (January, 1962), p. 98.

grim to be genuinely funny."¹³ Several comments noted above might be reconsidered here as well.

Some notion of the range of the novel, and the effect it has on a reader, may be gathered from a consideration of remarks made by Philip Toynbee in the course of a very favorable review:

When I began reading Catch-22 I thought it was a farcical satire on life in the United States Army Air Force. Later I believed that Mr. Heller's target was modern war and all those responsible for waging it. Still later it seemed that he was attacking social organization and anyone who derives power from it. But by the end of the book it had become clear to me that it is--no other phrase will do--the human condition itself which is the object of Mr. Heller's outraged fury and disgust.¹⁴

Toynbee is correct on each count and in his final conclusion.

The almost mythic proportions of the novel coupled with the fact that within it one can detect traces of almost every technique for which modern criticism has provided a label has proved too much for the critics. With little difficulty the novel may be seen as possessing affinities with the form of the picaresque, the romance-parody, and what Northrop Frye calls the 'anatomy.' It

¹³"Airman's Wacky War," New York Herald Tribune, October 15, 1961.

¹⁴Observer Weekend Review, June 17, 1962.

contains elements of surrealism, 'black humor,' the grotesque and tragi-comedy. It is related to the literature of the Absurd and the literature of apocalypse. Tossarian, the main protagonist, is a direct descendant from the semi-mythic 'anti-hero.'

By extending reality to the point of distortion and placing emphasis, in terms of both style and content, on the disrelations and discontinuity of the modern experience, Heller places himself within the tradition of the extreme ironic mode which is fore-shadowed in the fiction of Swift, Gogol, Louis-Ferdinand Celine, William Faulkner, Kafka, and Nathanael West. He is, of course, not alone in projecting such a view of fiction and of the modern world. Among more recent writers who are to a greater or lesser degree within the same tradition one might mention Nelson Algren, Ralph Ellison, Ken Kesey, James Purdy, Thomas Pynchon, and Terry Southern, in the United States alone.¹⁵

It may well be disconcerting to the faint-hearted among our critics that our best novelists insist on casting their comments on our time in terms of extreme and sometimes brutal irony. But the reviewer for Daedalus.

¹⁵Jesse P. Ritter, Fearful Comedy: The Fiction of Joseph Heller and Gunther Grass (1968), p. 1.

who is compelled at the end of his tirade to offer the following advice to Heller:

"Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think of these things."¹⁶

might do well to consider Stendhal's comment that:

"A novel is a mirror. Why do you blame the mirror? The mirror reflects dirt, and you accuse the mirror."¹⁷

And those who, for one reason or another, refuse to judge Catch-22 in relation to the novelistic genre might do well to consider a comment by A.E. Dyson concerning the ironic mode: "In ironic writing it need not surprise us if a writer's achievement is more orderly and creative than the account of human nature embodied in it would seem to permit."¹⁸

This is very close to the heart of the problem presented by a critical examination of Catch-22. The world of Catch-22 is a chaotic, absurd, irrational, illogical, insane world which is, for the most part,

¹⁶(Winter, 1963), p. 165.

¹⁷Quoted in Mike Newberry, "Anger and Laughter in Catch-22 Rip Morality Mask off Free World," The Worker (March 5, 1963), p. 6.

¹⁸The Crazy Fabric: Essays in Irony (1966), p.

peopled by madmen. One may not be prepared to admit that this is an accurate picture of the world in which we live but to dismiss the novel on this point alone can hardly be called criticism. There are legitimate reasons for condemning a novel but the fact that one does not agree with the philosophy or world view it expounds is surely not one of them. Similarly, the question of preference alone does not provide sufficient grounds for damning a novelist's method.

Jean Kennard concludes an excellent article on Catch-22 by remarking that:

After attempting to relate his preconceptions about novels, his "illusions" about the form, to this novel, the reader is finally stripped of them. Catch-22 simultaneously shows man's illusory view of the world, employs techniques to suggest the irrational nature of the world and is itself an object against which the truth of its statements may be tested.¹⁹

This is directly related to the point made earlier concerning the necessity of taking sides regarding this novel. In the last analysis one either accepts or rejects the logic of catch-22. At this point it becomes necessary to consider the novel in the same way. One must either accept the demand to re-evaluate one's concept of the novel in the light of Heller's approach or reject that

¹⁹"Joseph Heller: At War With Absurdity," Mosaic, 4:3 (1971), p. 87.

approach as a dismal failure. The latter would demand such a narrow definition of the term 'novel' that a great deal of the books being written under that heading would of necessity have to be excluded as well. Such drastic measures hardly seem necessary.

ii. Structure as déjà vu

One of the most common charges laid against Catch-22 is that, good or bad, the novel lacks structure or form. Several criticisms previously cited stress this point. "Nonetheless, a careful reading of Catch-22, combined with some knowledge of the contours of twentieth-century fiction, reveals a tangible structure and order in the novel. It is simply a different type of structure and order from that to which the novel-orientated reader may be accustomed."²⁰ This is not to make a case for Catch-22 as a literary puzzle, nor is it to endow the novel with a naive simplicity which it does not possess.

There is no need to view this novel as "some sort of gifted example of what in literature must be thought to approximate the drip-and-smear school of modern painting."²¹ Some of the best comments on the novel have

²⁰ Ritter, pp. 9-10.

²¹ Jan Solomon, "The Structure of Joseph Heller's Catch-22," Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction, 9:2 (1967), p. 47.

adopted this attitude. Robert Brustein, whose review is excellent in many respects, does not fully come to terms with the novel's 'formlessness.'

Considering his indifference to surface reality, it is absurd to judge Heller by standards of psychological realism (or, for that matter, by conventional artistic standards at all, since his book is as formless as any picaresque epic). He is concerned entirely with that thin boundary of the surreal, the borderline between hilarity and horror, which, much like the apparent formlessness of the unconscious, has its own special integrity and coherence.²²

Except for the parenthetical comment which overstates the case, this comment is close to the truth.

Some understanding of the "special integrity and coherence" of Catch-22 can be gathered from a brief consideration of the concept of the 'anatomy' as expressed by Northrop Frye. In the course of his discussion he links books which share many similarities with Catch-22 to a firm heritage while, at the same time, he separates them from over-narrow concepts of the novel.

Petronius, Apuleius, Rabelais, Swift and Voltaire all use a loose-jointed narrative form often confused with the romance. It differs from the romance, however... as it is not primarily concerned with the exploits of

²²"The Logic of Survival in a Lunatic World," New Republic (November 13, 1961), p. 13.

heroes, but relies on the free play of intellectual fancy and the kind of humorous observation that produces caricature. It differs also from the picaresque form, which has the novel's interest in the actual structure of the society. At its most concentrated the Menippean satire presents us with a vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern. The intellectual structure built up from the story makes for violent dislocations in the customary logic of narrative, though the appearance of carelessness that results reflects only the carelessness of the reader or his tendency to judge by a novel-centered conception of fiction.²³

The last sentence here is one which one would like to see in some of the attempted reviews of Catch-22. Yet one must be careful when attempting to categorize Catch-22 too easily. A recent Coles Notes on Catch-22 "solves" the structural problems of the novel in a couple of pages. Frye offers a word of caution which is appropriate here. He points out that "when we examine fiction from the point of view of form, we can see four chief strands binding it together, novel, confession, anatomy, and romance."²⁴ And he goes on to note the tendency of the modern novel to mix genres and adds that "more comprehensive fictional schemes usually employ at least three forms."²⁵ This is even more to be noted in much

²³Anatomy of Criticism (1969), p. 310.

²⁴Ibid., p. 312.

²⁵Ibid., p. 313.

recent fiction where forms and techniques are often mixed and sometimes parodied in the same work. Such is the case with Catch-22.

On the most literal level Catch-22 deals with an American bomber group stationed on the island of Pianosa²⁶ during the closing months of the Second World War. The actual time of the novel is only a few months although events described occur as far back as early 1943 or before. The central character is one John Yossarian--at first lieutenant and later captain--a lead bombardier whose main concern seems to be to survive the war. The novel contains forty-two chapters, all except four of which are named for characters. There are some seventy characters actually named although only about forty are significant in the main action of the novel. There are several others who are simply described, such as the bloated colonel with the fat mustache. The prime mover among the characters is Colonel Cathcart, the Group Commander, who continually raises the number of bombing missions his men must fly. The novel moves forward to a point where all the more significant characters are killed, disappear, desert, or prosper as they confront the inexorable and ever-present law of catch-22. Catch-22 is the fundamental

²⁶ The island is located ten miles south south west of Elba, but its geographical 'reality' is not a concern in the novel.

concept around which the novel revolves. Continually mentioned, but never fully defined, catch-22, among other things, is the unwritten loophole in every written law which exploits the irrationality and absurdity of every human action and insures that those in power remain there and those who do not have power remain without it. The failure to realize the integral function of the logic of catch-22, leads to a total oversimplification of the novel. Douglas Day points this out when he offers an example of the way in which Catch-22 might be "judged by the standards of the Establishment:"

It is on its literal level a fiction about the Second World War in Europe--specifically, about a group of American medium bombers operating in Italy in 1943-44. Among its leaders are men whom Colonel Glenn would find entirely admirable: there is iron-clad Colonel Cathcart, who bravely demands sixty missions of all his crews when other groups are flying only forty; there is Captain Appleby, a fair-haired youth from Iowa, and a truly splendid ping-pong player, who believes in God, Motherhood, and the American Way of Life; there is Captain Havermeyer, a lead navigator who never hesitates to risk his own life (and whose cheeks are perpetually flecked with bits of good old American peanut brittle); there is Captain "Aarfy" Aardvaark, a good fraternity man and a protector of virtuous women; and there is Milo Minderbinder, the conscientious squadron mess officer, who will do anything to keep his charges well fed.²⁷

Such hypothetical criticism would be similar to the type which sees Gulliver's Travels as a most entertaining tale for children and

²⁷ "Catch-22: A Manifesto for Anarchists," p. 87.

Gargantua and Pantagruel as a slightly overstated 'handbook' on the education of young gentlemen.

It has already been made clear that Yossarian is of central importance to the novel. His importance cannot be stressed too much in terms of the narrative structure of the novel. He is our guide through the inferno that is the world of Catch-22. "The narrative method can best be described as a modified or objectified stream of consciousness. Most of the events are filtered through the consciousness of Yossarian. At times they are objectified re-creations of earlier events; at times they are Yossarian's memories triggered by outward events."²⁸ It is this which makes any attempt to consider the structure of Catch-22 apart from the time-scheme of the novel a fruitless effort. And the time-scheme in turn is directly related to Yossarian's psychological state.

Time is a crucial consideration throughout the novel, but one is not always confronted by the same concept of time. Throughout the novel, in fact, the reader is made aware of two separate chronologies, one spatial or temporal and one psychological. John Wain sensed this unique use of time and his comments are worth considering

²⁸Ritter, p. 13.

even though they are somewhat limited in scope.

To these bomber-pilots, life does not flow in a regular, unfolding ribbon, experience following on from experience....It teeters round and round in a continual stalemate. Each time they wait to fly on another mission, everything has to stand still until they know whether or not they are going to survive. The experiences they have in the meantime, all the escapist drinking, whoring and quarrelling, may be intense, but they are static and self-contained. They issue from nowhere and lead nowhere, being enclosed in a stiff cast of anxiety.²⁹

That this may well be true of the external facts of a flyer's life and that Heller's method is to hold back certain information until the reader is ready for it are both apt comments. But neither comment goes far enough toward a full explanation of the novel. The first notion limits the novel to a war story and the second ignores the influence of Yossarian. "However, a better explanation for the disjunction of narrative, the seeming chaos, lies neither in its fidelity to the external facts of a flyer's life nor to the needs of a reader. Rather, it is the protagonist's moral life, his inner-life, his psychological needs that account for the novel's delaying tactics."³⁰

²⁹"A New Novel About Old Troubles," Critical Quarterly (Summer, 1963), pp. 168-69.

³⁰James M. Mellard, "Catch-22: Déjà vu and the Labyrinth of Memory," Bucknell Review, 26:2 (1968), p. 36.

Since Yossarian is the medium through which the reader is exposed to the action of the novel, the reader is forced to make the journey with Yossarian and on his terms. The reader is permitted to see the final significance of events only as Yossarian becomes fully aware of their significance himself. Only when Yossarian's psychological journey brings him to a point where he is capable of insight is the reader permitted to share in this insight.

It is within this context that Yossarian's trips to the hospital assume their final importance. These stays in the hospital have a direct relation to the narrative and thematic development of the novel. Yossarian escapes to the hospital each time the horror of events surrounding him becomes too much for his consciousness to fathom. The hospital is seen as a refuge of sanity in an insane world, a place where a sane man surrounded by lunatics could seek temporary refuge. "They couldn't dominate Death inside the hospital, but they certainly made her behave."³¹ Later on he will learn that this, too, is an illusory sense of security, but for the moment it is better than being killed. The logic of catch-22 gives Yossarian carte blanche access to the hospital because he had "a pain in his liver that fell

³¹ Catch-22, p. 164.

just short of being jaundice. The doctors were puzzled by the fact that it wasn't quite jaundice. If it became jaundice they could treat it. If it didn't become jaundice and went away they could discharge him. But this just being short of jaundice all the time confused them."³²

The continual effort by Yossarian to impose a sane order on the insane events which surround him--and it should be recalled here that according to the others in the novel and the logic of catch-22 it is Yossarian who is insane--accounts for the circularity and the oblique, spiral form of the novel which Waugh mistook for 'prolixity' and which led Mailer to the mistaken conclusion that the novel could be cut anywhere, "like yard goods." Events appear and reappear, are told and retold; each time from a different vantage point and under a different set of circumstances. The hospital scenes, the soldier in white, the confused identities, the story of the dead man (Mudd) in Yossarian's tent, and, most important the story of Snowden's death appear again and again throughout the novel. An examination of this technique reveals that both narrative structure and time-scheme reinforce the thematic unity of the novel.

For more than the first one hundred and fifty pages of the novel all the events described occur in

³²Ibid., p. 1.

retrospect while Yossarian is in hospital. After this the novel moves slowly forward to the point of Yossarian's eventual desertion. But previous events are narrated objectively during these periods as well. The result of this is a blending of past and present to create a concept of time which seems to exist apart from either. "The ultimate effect of this technique is one of stasis; there is no sense of a Joycean character always moving through the present, carrying the past with him; the effect is of an eternal now--a fixed, cruel cosmos filled with the fixed venality of the aggressors, both enemy and friend."³³

It is Yossarian's struggle against this concept of stasis, represented ultimately by catch-22, that leads to a comparison of this novel with the type of the romance-parody. In a sense, Yossarian's progress may be compared to the adventures of the hero of this type: quest (Chapters I through XXVIII), vision (Chapter XXIX), and escape (Chapters XL to the end).³⁴

Any attempt to create a "sequence of events" for this novel apart from a constant awareness of this concept of time or without granting the apparent contradiction, that the novel's form lies in its seeming

³³Ritter, p. 14.

³⁴Denniston, p. 60.

formlessness, is a futile exercise. If one sets up a sequence of events as they occur in time it becomes artificial because it is the order in which these events appear in the novel, as they are revealed by Yossarian, that gives them their thematic meaning. On the other hand, if one sets up a sequence of events as they appear in the novel the concept of strict chronological time becomes peripheral.

Such an artificial chronology could be worked out. We know that Yossarian trained at Lowery Field in Colorado. He is posted overseas where he becomes involved in a war marked by ever increasing bombing missions, the rise to power of Milo Minderbinder, and the death of most of his friends. This chronology is marked by his many acts of rebellion leading to his eventual desertion and his attempt to go to neutral Sweden. Within this framework it is even possible to place certain actions before the novel begins as opposed to those actions which occur afterward. Such an exercise could be most helpful as long as the following points are kept firmly in mind:

The actual narrative...is not chronological. Heller--like Proust, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Faulkner--is the heir of Henri Bergson: he does not view time as something dependent on and made relevant by the artificial orderings of the clock and the calendar; rather he regards it as something governed and made tangible by the consciousness of the individual, his

situation and his memory. The past operates in the present by forming the individual's apprehension of the present, coloring and outlining each significant moment.³⁵

The concept of déjà vu and the image of "The Soldier Who Saw Everything Twice," are two clues which Heller provides to an understanding of the unique structure of his novel. During his difficulties with Corporal Whitcomb over the Colonel's form letters and at the time when the full investigation into the Washington Irving affair is about to descend upon him, the chaplain comments on déjà vu:

For a few precarious seconds, the chaplain tingled with a weird sensation of having experienced the identical situation before in some prior time or existence. He endeavoured to trap and nourish the impression in order to predict, and perhaps even control, what incident would occur next, but the afflatus melted away unproductively, as he had known beforehand it would. Déjà vu. The subtle, recurring confusion between illusion and reality that was characteristic of paramnesia fascinated the chaplain....³⁶

Like the chaplain, the reader gets the "occult sensation of having experienced the identical situation before," as he progresses through the novel. And, like the unfortunate soldier he "sees" events in the novel at least twice and sometimes more. The scene describing Snowden's death, for instance, is presented nine times.

³⁵James L. McDonald, "I See Everything Twice!! The Structure of Joseph Heller's Catch-22," University of Kansas Review, 34:3 (March, 1968), p. 176.

³⁶Catch-22, p. 202.

This narrative rhythm is essential to the novel and any attempt to create a chronology that would, in the final analysis, ignore or attempt to deny this would do great violence to the novel. Nevertheless, certain key events, such as Yossarian's trips to the hospital, the continual increase in the number of required bombing missions, and the order of the more significant missions may be used as pivotal points around which a more or less objective time-scheme can be established. An absolute, iron-clad, chronology is neither possible nor desirable to an understanding of the novel's structure or of Heller's purpose.

When, in Chapter I, we first meet Yossarian the missions are already set at forty-five and he has escaped to the relative safety of the hospital with his liver condition. Certain key events are introduced here. Yossarian's friendship with the chaplain is established. Washington Irving, the mysterious, all-purpose, signature is created. We meet also, for the first time, the enigmatic soldier in white. Driven from the ward and the hospital by the Texan, who "turned out to be good-natured, generous and likable," with the result that "in three days no one could stand him,"³⁷ Yossarian goes back into

³⁷Ibid., p. 9.

combat only to find that the missions are soon raised, a situation which drives him right back into the hospital again.

It is plain from the references to "past" events in the early chapters of the novel that many of the most significant actions have already taken place, that is, they precede the point of time at which the novel opens. In fact the critical event of the novel in terms of Yossarian's psychological development--the death of Snowden and the revelation of his secret--has already taken place. In addition, The Glorious Atabrine Insurrection, The Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade, and The Great Big Siege of Bologna have also taken place. Avignon and Ferrara have been bombed. Besides Snowden, Kraft, Clevinger, and several less significant characters are already dead.

Also firmly established in these early chapters is the narrative rhythm which controls much of the movement of the novel and which relates the structure of the novel to the concept of déjà vu. Yossarian, alarmed by the increase in the number of missions, succeeds in bringing his grievance to the attention of the elusive Major Major who offers him the option of flying only limited risk missions (milk-runs).³⁸ Yossarian refuses

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 99-102.

the deal as he will refuse the "odious deal" offered to him by Cathcart and Korn at the end of the novel. His flight to Rome and his encounter with Luciana (Chapter XVI) foreshadow his later trip to Rome when he goes absent without official leave and gets involved with Nately's Whore at the climax of the novel.

As mentioned above, it is possible to impose divisions on the novel by using the hospital scenes as pivotal points. Three divisions have been suggested.³⁹ Chapters one and seventeen which deal with the same hospitalization can be seen as enclosing the first section. At the end of Chapter XVI, when Yossarian returns from his bout in Rome with Luciana, he meets Hungry Joe:

"Forty missions," Hungry Joe announced readily in a voice lyrical with relief and elation. "The colonel raised them again."

Yossarian was stunned. "But I've got thirty-two, goddammit! Three more and I would have been through."

Hungry Joe shrugged indifferently. "The colonel wants forty missions," he repeated.

Yossarian shoved him out of the way and ran right into the hospital.⁴⁰

He is determined to stay there rather than fly one more mission beyond the thirty-two he has. But in ten days he is driven back into combat by the Texan. But the

³⁹Solomon, p. 50.

⁴⁰Catch-22, p. 163.

missions are raised again, to forty-five, and "Yossarian ran right back in, determined to remain in hospital forever rather than fly one mission more than the six missions more he had just flown."⁴¹ This quotation occurs in the first paragraph of Chapter XVII. A few paragraphs later, events in this chapter are seen to be the same events described in Chapter I:

The soldier in white was constituted entirely of gauze, plaster and a thermometer, and the thermometer was merely an adornment left balanced in the empty black hole in the bandages over his mouth early each morning and late each afternoon by Nurse Cramer....it seemed that Nurse Cramer, rather than the talkative Texan, had murdered the soldier in white....⁴²

Thus, by a skillful manipulation of time Heller has brought us back to the opening of the novel--with Yossarian in hospital and the missions set at forty-five.

Practically everything which is described in these first seventeen chapters is "past" action. However, certain "present" events, that is, events which are to be seen as taking place after the opening of the novel, are mentioned here as well. Such events as Yossarian's plea to Major Major and the increase in the missions to fifty

⁴¹Ibid., p. 164.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 165-66. (The italics are mine.)

and then to fifty-five are examples.⁴³ This technique creates a balance with the sections which follow. These later sections focus more and more on "present" action but references to "past" events continue to occur.

Chapter XVII, "The Soldier Who Saw Everything Twice," divides the first and second sections and besides developing the second image which reinforces Heller's narrative technique, it takes the reader back to a point even further past, to the training camp at Lowery Field in Colorado. Here we are introduced to Yossarian's very first hospitalization:

That was the most illogical Thanksgiving he could ever remember spending, and his thoughts returned wishfully to his halcyon fourteen-day quarantine in the hospital the year before; but even that idyll had ended on a tragic note: he was still in good health when the quarantine period was over, and they told him again that he had to get out and go to war. Yossarian sat up in bed when he heard the bad news and shouted,

"I see everything twice!"⁴⁴

He has decided to follow the example of the soldier who saw everything twice until "the night his talented roommate died, and Yossarian decided that he had followed him far enough."⁴⁵ This chapter ends with Yossarian taking

⁴³Ibid., p. 58.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 179. (The Thanksgiving mentioned here is one year before the Thanksgiving dealt with in Chapter XXXIV.)

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 180.

the identity of the late soldier for the benefit of the soldier's visiting parents. The confusion of identities is a motif which will recur again.

Chapter XIX, "Colonel Cathcart," begins the second section which deals more with "present" events but does not neglect the "past" completely. This section too is marked by hospital scenes and further increases in the missions. The chaplain's problems with Cathcart, Corporal Whitcomb, and his "involvement" in the Washington Irving affair are developed. When the missions reach sixty Dobbs approaches Yossarian and reveals his (Dobbs') plan to kill Colonel Cathcart.⁴⁶ Nately's involvement with his whore and the Old Man is treated at length (Chapter XXIII). But "past" events related to Yossarian's nakedness after the Avignon mission and during Snowden's funeral, and the moaning during the briefing sessions are developed more fully as well.

At the end of this section Yossarian finds himself in the hospital again, this time with a legitimate leg wound caused by Aarfy's poor navigation.⁴⁷ It is here that the change of identities occurs again, but with unfortunate ramifications. Dunbar and Yossarian "pull

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 222-23.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 283-85.

rank" and become involved with Anthony F. Fortiori and Warrant Officer Homer Lumley in a change of names. Shortly afterward Yossarian is certified insane by the hospital psychiatrist and gets the idea that he will now be sent home. He is elated. The discharge papers arrive; they are for A. Fortiori. Yossarian and Dunbar are ordered back into combat.

From this point onward the novel tends to concentrate more on "present" action and the pace of the narrative quickens almost to a frenzy. As the pace quickens the atmosphere becomes increasingly bizarre. Lieutenant Scheisskopf ("shithead") arrives and soon becomes a general and is put in charge of Special Services. Shortly thereafter Special Services takes control of combat operations so that Scheisskopf becomes the supreme authority. Yossarian is stripped, one by one, of his friends. McWatt and Kid Sampson die horrible deaths. Doc Daneeka dies, officially at least. Chief White Halfoat dies of pneumonia and Hungry Joe is smothered by Huple's cat; both deaths occur exactly as they have been predicted by the characters themselves. Orr disappears; Dunbar is "disappeared." Finally, even Natelly is killed.

It must not be presumed that such attention to chronology and division solves the structural problems presented by this novel. It simply provides a background,

a framework, against which the integral structure of the novel may be considered. However, before this is undertaken, it is necessary to discuss more fully the order of the main bombing missions. This is necessary because Solomon and others have insisted on ordering most of the other events in the novel in relation to these more significant missions and because these missions mark the occurrence of many of the most significant deaths in the novel.

Solomon contends that the first mission to Avignon preceded the first mission to Bologna.⁴⁸ As a result of this he creates problems which are only phantoms. On textual evidence alone it can be established that the most significant bombing missions are six in number and take place in the following order: Orvieto, Bologna, Ferrara, Avignon, the second mission to Avignon, and the second mission to Bologna.

It is mentioned in Chapter X that the dead man in Yossarian's tent (Mudd) was killed at Orvieto. Mudd has become something of a mystery in Sergeant Towser's mind and he, too, begins to think of him in the same terms as Yossarian, as "the dead man in Yossarian's tent."

⁴⁸Solomon, p. 52.

In reality, he was no such thing. He was simply a replacement pilot who had been killed in combat before he had officially reported for duty. He had stopped at the operations tent to inquire the way to the orderly room tent and had been sent right into action because so many men had completed the thirty-five missions required then that Captain Piltchard and Captain Wren were finding it difficult to assemble the number of crews specified by Group.⁴⁹

The next paragraph states that Mudd was "blown into bits over Orvieto less than two hours after he arrived." The mention of thirty-five missions in connection with Orvieto would be enough in itself to place this mission first since the missions required at the time of the other missions is always higher. But it is also made clear that Orvieto took place three months before The Great Big Siege of Bologna.⁵⁰

Chapters XIV to XVI inclusive deal with The Great Big Siege of Bologna and the events immediately following it. In Rome, after Bologna, Yossarian states that Snowden "was still alive then."⁵¹ It is a fact that Snowden was killed on the first Avignon mission, which obviously has not yet been flown. It has already been

⁴⁹Catch-22, p. 106.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 107.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 162.

established that it is when Yossarian returns from this stay in Rome that the missions are raised to forty. It has also been established that this sends Yossarian to the hospital. He stays there ten days, comes out and flies six more missions, and goes back in when the missions are raised to forty-five. It is here that we find him at the opening of the novel.

During his confinement he muses that "being in the hospital was better than being over Bologna or flying over Avignon with Huple and Dobbs at the controls and Snowden dying in back."⁵² In the next paragraph he recalls Kraft who was killed over Ferrara. This suggests that both Ferrara and Avignon were missions included in the six he flew in the brief period between the two hospitalizations.

Furthermore, it seems likely that Ferrara preceded Avignon. It was as a result of the second run over the bridge at Ferrara that Yossarian received his medal. As a result of being drenched with Snowden's blood on the Avignon mission, Yossarian refuses to wear his uniform. He is still naked when he is presented with the medal. This suggests that the Ferrara mission comes first.

⁵²Ibid., p. 164.

It is not clear whether Solomon mentions the second mission to Avignon at all or whether he simply confuses the two. This mission is significant because it is Orr's final trial run. He ditches the plane safely and checks out all the equipment in the life raft. This is recounted in great detail by Sergeant Knight and a close reading of the passage makes it clear that it is intended to prepare the reader for Orr's escape to Sweden.⁵³ The second Bologna mission is the one on which Orr disappears.⁵⁴

The artificial nature of this reduction to chronological sequence has continually been stressed in the foregoing discussion. The necessity of so treating such a sequence becomes clear when we consider the history of Milo Minderbinder's rise to power. Solomon's treatment of Milo is worth considering here.

While the dominant sequence of events shifts back and forth from the present to the past treating any period of time as equally present, equally immediate, a counter-motion controls the time of the history of Milo Minderbinder. Across the see-saw pattern of events in the rest of the novel Minderbinder moves directly forward from one success to the next. In the solid fashion of nineteenth century fiction, he begins the novel as a

⁵³Ibid., pp. 301ff.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 310.

hard-working young hopeful dreaming of a syndicate and ends wielding absolute power. Independently, each chronology is valid and logical; together the two time-schemes are impossible. By manipulating the points at which the different systems cross, Heller creates a structural absurdity of character and event in the novel.⁵⁵

This passage has been quoted in full for only one reason; it is, except for the last sentence, an oversimplified understatement. It is an understatement because no chronology is possible for Milo at all. Milo defies time, space and logic; he has no beginning and no end. Milo is an eternal omnipresence. He is treated as such because he, more than anything else in the novel, is the symbol of everything against which the frail humanity of Yossarian must struggle if it is to survive.

Milo is first mentioned in Chapter II. Yossarian remarks that when he returned to the squadron from the hospital (the hospitalization which has already been established as the opening of the novel) Milo was away in Smyrna for the fig harvest. There is no doubt that even at this time Milo has his operations in full swing, for the mess halls run smoothly in his absence:

There was shish-kabob for lunch, huge, savory hunks of spitted meat sizzling like the devil over charcoal after marinating seventy-two hours in a secret mixture Milo had stolen from

⁵⁵Solomon, p. 48.

a crooked trader in the Levant, served with Iranian rice and asparagus tips Parmesan, followed by cherries jubilee for dessert and then steaming cups of fresh coffee with Benedictine and brandy. The meal was served in enormous helpings on damask tablecloths by the skilled Italian waiters Major----de Coverley had kidnapped from the mainland and given to Milo.⁵⁶

At the end of Chapter III we learn that one morning during The Great Big Siege of Bologna Havermeyer fell into "one of the slit trenches that had appeared like magic beside every tent the morning after Milo Minderbinder had bombed the squadron."⁵⁷ This places the bombing of the squadron by Syndicate planes before Bologna, that is, in the "past" time of the novel. In itself, this presents no difficulty. We are familiar with past events being treated in this manner. However, the next time Milo appears is when Yossarian is released from hospital, as mentioned above. Yossarian is back in the squadron but a short time when he is introduced to Milo by Corporal Snark:

"This is Lieutenant Milo Minderbinder, sir," said Corporal Snark with a derisive smirk. "One of our new pilots. He became mess officer while you were in hospital this last time."⁵⁸

⁵⁶Catch-22, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 30.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 60.

While this appears to be a literal statement and one which would place the time of Milo's arrival on Pianosa to coincide with the opening of the novel, it obviously cannot be taken this way. This is Solomon's mistake when he says that Milo "begins the novel as a hard-working young hopeful." Practically every other reference to Milo contradicts this. In one sentence we are told that Milo is just beginning, but we are also told of Milo's involvement in such earlier events as Orvieto, where Milo's planes attacked and Milo's planes defended, and where Mudd was killed, and the bombing of Pianosa by Syndicate planes, which obviously preceded Bologna. Bologna, of course, preceded the events described in the opening of the novel.

At the center of this deliberate structural absurdity is Heller's refusal to define exactly the time of the cornering of the Egyptian cotton market. This event is of central importance to Milo's history because it was as a result of the economic problems which this created that Milo contracted with both sides at Orvieto and for the bombing of his own squadron. The cornering of the cotton market (Chapter XXII) and the bombing of the squadron (Chapter XXIV) are both recounted in great detail--except for the time they occur. Added to this, it must be remembered that Milo is a master of the lie.

Concerning Orvieto he tells Yossarian that he can take no responsibility for Mudd's death because "[he] wasn't even there that day,"⁵⁹ while he tells Colonel Cathcart that he feels guilty about claiming the Orvieto raid as one of his six missions "since I was in Orvieto at the time directing the antiaircraft fire."⁶⁰ In the same conversation with Cathcart, Milo says he has been overseas only eleven months.

A final indication of Heller's treatment of Milo can be gathered by a consideration of what Milo has accomplished in these eleven months. When Yossarian and Orr accompany Milo on the flight which results in the cornering of the cotton market they learn that not only is Milo the Mayor of Palermo, Carini, Monreale, Bagheria, Termini Imerese, Cefali, Mistretta, and Nicosia but also that he has been knighted, commissioned a major in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and named Assistant Governor-General of Malta. They discover as well that Milo is Vice-Shah of Oran, Caliph of Baghdad, Imam of Damascus and Sheik of Araby. In fact, it is revealed to them that "Milo was the corn god, the rain god and the rice god in backward regions where such crude gods were still

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 250.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 363.

worshipped by ignorant and superstitious people, and deep-inside the jungles of Africa, he intimated with becoming modesty, large graven images of his mustached face could be found overlooking primitive stone altars red with human blood."⁶¹

When Milo suggests that someone will have to run the Syndicate if he is expected to fly combat missions, Colonel Cathcart volunteers. Milo appears pleased and outlines the Syndicate's commitments:

"Thank you, sir, that's very good of you. Begin with a salt-free diet for General Peckem and a fat-free diet for General Dreedle."

"Let me get a pencil. What's next?"

"The cedars."

"Cedars?"

"From Lebanon."

"Lebanon?"

"We've got cedars from Lebanon due at the sawmill in Oslo to be turned into shingles for the builder in Cape Cod. C.O.D. And then there's the peas."

"Peas?"

"That are on the high seas. We've got boatloads of peas that are on the high seas from Atlanta to Holland to pay for the tulips that were shipped to Geneva to pay for the cheese that must go to Vienna M.I.F."

"M.I.F.?"

"Money in Front. The Hapsburgs are shaky."

"Milo."

"And don't forget the galvanized zinc in the warehouse at Flint. Four carloads of galvanized zinc from Flint must be flown to the smelters in Damascus by noon of the eighteenth, terms F.O.B. Calcutta two per cent ten days E.O.M. One Messerschmitt full of hemp is due in Belgrade for

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 230-33.

a C-47 and a half full of those semi-pitted dates we stuck them with from Khartoum. Use the money from the Portuguese anchovies we're selling back to Lisbon to pay for the Egyptian cotton we've got coming back to us from Mamaroneck and to pick up as many oranges as you can in Spain. Always pay cash for naranjas."

"Naranjas?"

"That's what they call oranges in Spain, and these are Spanish oranges. And--oh, yes. Don't forget Piltdown Man."

"Piltdown Man?"

"Yes, Piltdown Man. The Smithsonian Institution is not in a position at this time to meet our price for a second Piltdown Man, but they are looking forward to the death of a wealthy and beloved donor and---"

"Milo."

"France wants all the parsley we can send them, and I think we might as well, because we'll need the francs for the lire for the pfennigs for the dates when they get back. I've also ordered a tremendous shipment of Peruvian balsa wood for distribution to each of the mess halls in the syndicate on a pro rata basis."

"Balsa wood? What are the mess halls going to do with balsa wood?"

"Good balsa wood isn't so easy to come by these days, Colonel. I just didn't think it was a good idea to pass up the chance to buy it."

"No, I suppose not," Colonel Cathcart surmised vaguely with the look of somebody seasick. "And I assume the price was right."

"The price," said Milo, "was outrageous-- positively exorbitant! But since we bought it from one of our own subsidiaries, we were happy to pay it. Look after the hides."

"The hives?"

"The hides."

"The hides?"

"The hides. In Buenos Aires. They have to be tanned."

"Tanned?"

"In Newfoundland. And.... 62"

The list goes on and on until Cathcart admits that Milo is indispensable and that the syndicate would crumble without his guidance. The only alternative is to order the men to fly more missions in Milo's place to compensate for the ones Milo cannot fly. After all, as Milo is fond of repeating, everyone has a share.

It is evident that any attempt to create a logical chronology for Milo would put one in a position similar to Colonel Cathcart in the scene just quoted. However, it would be a greater error to assume that because Milo defies chronology he therefore does not have a place in the structural economy of Catch-22. The two time-schemes--and at this point the idea of time-schemes had best be reconsidered to refer to separate realities or states of existence--of Yossarian and Milo may now be seen to enforce thematic considerations, not the least of which is "the repudiation of the business ethic."⁶³

However, a more significant parallel is to be noted. It has already been made clear that the time-scheme of the novel is directly tied to Yossarian's psychological state. As the novel progresses past and present events merge in their motivational effect on Yossarian. His increasing awareness of the danger to

⁶³Solomon, p. 55.

himself and the increased aggressiveness of his insubordinate acts are paralleled by Milo's greatest triumphs. The single most significant event in Yossarian's development is the death of Snowden. The explanation of Yossarian's nakedness as a result of being covered with Snowden's blood on the Avignon mission and his nakedness during Snowden's funeral are given in the chapter titled "Milo" (XXIV). While Yossarian sits naked in the tree during Snowden's funeral, Milo approaches him with his latest scheme to make a profit on his mistake--chocolate-covered cotton. In terms of any artificial chronology Milo, perhaps, should not be there, but the thematic logic of this scene is perfect. Furthermore, this scene is given archetypal significance. Milo, like the Edenic snake, inches his way up the tree--"the tree of life...and of knowledge of good and evil, too," according to Yossarian; "a chestnut tree," according to Milo--to tempt Yossarian into joining the Syndicate. Yossarian resists the temptation and the opposing realities of business and death are excellently delineated in the conversation:

"Look at that! he [Milo] exclaimed in alarm.
 "Look at that! That's a funeral going on down there. That looks like the cemetery. Isn't it?"
 Yossarian answered him slowly in a level voice. "They're burying that kid who got killed in my plane over Avignon the other day. Snowden."
 "What happened to him?" Milo asked in a voice

deadened with awe.

"He got killed."

"That's terrible," Milo grieved, and his large brown eyes filled with tears. "That poor kid. It really is terrible." He bit his trembling lip hard, and his voice rose with emotion when he continued. "And it will get even worse if the mess halls don't agree to buy more cotton. Yossarian, what's the matter with them? Don't they realize it's their syndicate? Don't they know they all have a share?"

"Did the dead man in my tent have a share?" Yossarian demanded caustically.⁶⁴

When the final, dreadful, details of Snowden's death are revealed and when we, too, learn Snowden's secret because Yossarian has finally comprehended its significance, we also learn that while Snowden lay dying in the back of the plane and complaining of the cold, Yossarian had attempted to ease his agony with morphine, but:

There was no morphine in the first-aid kit, no protection for Snowden against pain but the numbing shock of the gaping wound itself. The twelve syrettes of morphine had been stolen from their case and replaced by a cleanly lettered note that said: "What is good for M & M Enterprises is good for the country. Milo Minderbinder."⁶⁵

The confrontation of Milo and Snowden is given its strongest structural significance through the chaplain and his involvement with the concept of déjà vu. The chaplain has been bothered by a vision of two men--one

⁶⁴Catch-22, pp. 257ff.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 426.

naked and one clothed--he thinks he might have seen in a tree while he was conducting Snowden's funeral. Although the chaplain never actually links Yossarian with the naked man in the tree, he is haunted by the "feeling that he had met Yossarian somewhere before the first time he had met Yossarian in bed in the hospital."⁶⁶ It is this feeling that this first meeting was on "some occasion far more momentous and occult...in some remote, submerged and perhaps even entirely spiritual epoch..."⁶⁷ that leads the chaplain into his consideration of the concept of déjà vu.

Thus, the structure of the novel relies on the techniques of delayed revelation, incremental repetition, déjà vu and the omnipresence of Milo to enforce the novel's main point: the vindication of Yossarian's approach and the repudiation of Milo's, that is, the repudiation of catch-22. The seeming contradiction presented by the structural impossibilities set up in the novel mirror the contradiction presented by the logic of catch-22. In the final analysis it is the sane men (Milo) who are crazy and the crazy bastards (Yossarian and Orr) who are sane.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 262.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 263.

iii. Yossarian in Wonderland.

A definitive analysis of the ramifications of Heller's stylistic method would require much more than space permits. Frederick Crews suggests this in the course of a comment on recent fiction when he writes:

What is new about American fiction of the past few years? Many readers would answer: Read Catch-22 and find out. That is not bad advice if we have to rely on a single book....⁶⁸

Nevertheless, some indication of Heller's achievement may be gained by a consideration of Catch-22 in the light of recent developments in the novel in particular and in relation to the larger contours of contemporary literature in general.

It is not the intention here to attempt a definition of Catch-22 within the context of the Jamesian "well-made novel." The contention is, nonetheless, that within the context of its own artistic integrity, Catch-22 may be seen at once as prototype and antitype of the contemporary novel. Thus, it is necessary to examine Catch-22 in relation to the influences which several definable literary and non-literary strains have had in shaping recent fiction. This is of primary importance

⁶⁸"They're Mannerists, Not Moralists," Book Week, January 10, 1965.

because "until we are willing to learn more from our new writers about "what a novel ought to be"...we will continue as readers to live under the shadow of an antique vision and to miss the new disclosures that are coming from contemporary writers."⁶⁹ Finally, it is necessary to consider Catch-22 within the tradition to which it belongs, the tradition of the ironic mode, parody and satire, and to consider Heller's view in the light of the contemporary sensibility.

But what is it we are expected to learn from our new writers? The fundamental concept is that our expectations about what novels should be not be imposed as a necessary condition for granting worth to a particular novel. Alain Robbe-Grillet points out that:

we are so accustomed to discussions of "character," "atmosphere," "form," and "content," of "message" and "narrative ability" and "true novelists" that it requires an effort to free ourselves from this spider web and realize that it represents an idea about the novel...and not at all that so-called "nature" of the novel in which we are supposed to believe.⁷⁰

He continues by pointing out the emphasis which has been placed on such notions as those which demand that a novel "tell a story

⁶⁹ John W. Hunt, "Comic Escape and Anti-Vision: The Novels of Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon," in Adversity and Grace, ed. N.A. Scott (1968), p. 89.

⁷⁰ For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction (1965), p. 25.

and be indeed "a slice of life."⁷¹ The purpose here is not to enter into an evaluation of Robbe-Grillet and the relative merits of the French new novel. It is to create a framework of openmindedness in which to discuss the matter at hand: Joseph Heller's Catch-22. What is required on the part of the reader or critic of this novel is a willingness to re-evaluate the terms enumerated by Robbe-Grillet and to approach Catch-22 with a view to determining what it is as a novel rather than what it should be in terms of some predetermined definition of what novels are. Robbe-Grillet summarizes this attitude in a comment on the relationship between the author and the reader of modern novels:

the author today proclaims his absolute need of the reader's cooperation, an active, conscious, creative assistance. What he asks of him is no longer to receive ready-made a world complete, full, closed upon itself, but on the contrary to participate in a creation, to invent in his turn the work--and the world--and thus to learn to invent his own life.⁷²

It has already been noted that Heller's use of repetition, non sequitur, the witty paradox, and grotesque humor caused many critics and reviewers to condemn the novel as formless. It can easily be demonstrated that such techniques have a direct and necessary relation to

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 29-31.

⁷²Ibid., p. 156.

thematic considerations in the novel and, far from being the result of carelessness or poor editing, are proofs of Heller's capacity as a writer. Frye's remarks on Kierkegaard's concept of repetition could be applied as well to Catch-22. Heller's technique is "not the simple repeating of an experience, but the recreating of it which redeems or awakens it to life."⁷³

Preconceived notions regarding the range of parody, satire and farce also caused many critics to reject the novel. Yet it is Heller's use of these which invites comparison between Catch-22 and several of the greatest works of our literature. Nelson Algren was moved to point this out, not without a certain irony of his own:

And here for years I had been sweating out an assumption that fantasy and farce were qualities which might lift a book from reportage into a work of art! Tristram Shandy, Roderick Random, Joseph Andrews, Gulliver's Travels and Alice in Wonderland--no more than collections of anecdotes, mere parades of scenes gasping for want of craft and sensibility--and I hadn't heard one gasp.⁷⁴

It has been suggested above that Heller deliberately conceives the structure of his novel with a view to challenging "rationalist expectations" about the

⁷³Anatomy of Criticism, p. 345.

⁷⁴Chicago Daily News, June 23, 1961.

form of the novel. The relationship between structure and theme can easily be discovered by demonstrating that by his use of language and other fictional techniques Heller deliberately sets about to extend this challenge beyond considerations of structure to include our view of our supposedly rational world as well. In other words, stylistic techniques used in the novel are deliberately contrived to continually challenge our expectations about what a novel should be and how it should be written. But, by extension, if we are to grant the novel--as art--any reference to experience--to life--our expectations concerning the nature of that life experience are challenged as well; not only by what the novel proclaims but also by the method used to proclaim it. This is supported by the fact that references are made throughout the novel to implications which go beyond war and are intended, as Philip Toynbee suggests, to illustrate the absurdity of the human condition itself.

This raises the question of why Heller should use a military or war environment in the first place. Heller has offered the following explanation:

"Because that's where all dangers are most manifest, most apparent--and where comedy can be brutal and comic and sharp and where certain contrasts and contradictions become more evident."⁷⁵

There is nothing startling in this. Writers have continually made use of a microcosmic setting to state truths of macrocosmic significance. "Heller's island in war serves the same microscopic purpose as Hawkes's asylum in riot, or Borges's lottery in Babylon--or, for that matter, as Thomas Mann's magic mountain or Katherine Anne Porter's ship of fools. In each setting, the conditions of isolation and intensification help to dramatize with clarity and conviction the author's bleak vision of human nature."⁷⁶

A substantial portion of recent literature, both novel and drama, insists on portraying this "bleak vision of human nature," this view of the world which differs so radically from the more traditional Scholastic or Newtonian rationalities. It is not the intention here to enter into a discussion of the historical roots of Existentialism or to become involved in a digression on the nature of the Absurd. It is worth pointing out,

⁷⁵Quoted in Jeanne Sakol, "From 'The Catcher' to the 'Catch'," John O'London's (October 25, 1962), p. 373.

⁷⁶David Littlejohn "The Anti-Realists," Daedalus, 92:2 (Spring 1963), p. 258.

however, that present day man can no longer afford to view these conditions as the experiences of a sensitive minority. This is not to make a case for "the existential experience" as a twentieth century phenomenon only; one could trace it back to Tertullian's "Credo quia absurdum est."

But this is also an experience whose beginning is to be dated from that morning when Baudelaire looked out upon the billboards of Paris--"that vast cemetery that is called a great city"--and felt an immense disgust. And not only do we find it in writers like Baudelaire and Rimbaud and Dostoevski and Strindberg, but we also find it in artists like Cezanne and Van Gogh.... These were all men who belonged to that nineteenth-century vanguard of revolutionaries who were distinguished by the clarity and the courage with which they acknowledged the bitter facts of alienation and estrangement as the central facts of modern existence.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, in the twentieth century the experiences of this vanguard have become the life we all live. For, as Paul Tillich points out, "when with 31 July 1914, the nineteenth century came to an end, the Existentialist revolt ceased to be a revolt. It became the mirror of an experienced reality."⁷⁸ It has become a way of life which cuts across both cultural and national

⁷⁷Nathan A. Scott, "The Broken Center: A Definition of the Crisis of Values in Modern Literature," Chicago Review, 13:2 (Summer, 1959), pp. 197-98.

⁷⁸The Courage to Be (1965), p. 136.

lines. Elements of this experience are to be found in certain Bohemian philosophies and certain exaggerated and morbid negativities which find expression in innumerable modern trends and fads. In its essence, however, it is an expression of "anxiety and meaninglessness and of the attempt to take this anxiety into the courage to be as oneself."⁷⁹

In Catch-22 Heller reflects a view of the world which can be linked to that of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. The futility of human action, the Sisyphus-like existence, the experience of nausea, the confrontation of the "unnamable"--to use Beckett's phrase--and the alienation of the individual are all present in Heller's novel. "But there are innumerable contemporary novels which are fundamentally Existentialist. What is interesting about Catch-22 is that the experimental techniques Heller employs have a direct relation to Existentialist ideas; they are an attempt to "dramatize" his view of the human condition rather than merely describe it."⁸⁰

Catch-22 is more a "handbook" of the Absurd than a treatise which deals with the Absurd as a metaphysical

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 138.

⁸⁰Kennard, pp. 75-76.

concept. This is due largely to the presence of Yossarian and the view he proclaims in the novel. Yossarian knows, as much as one can know anything in the world of Catch-22, that he is sane and that he is surrounded by madmen. He is convinced that his way is right. He is not so naïve as to think that he has solved the problem of existence, but he is willing to give life a chance, as it were, if he can succeed in being permitted to live it on his own terms. It is, in a sense, the misuse of his world by those around him that causes him to experience the Absurd, to confront la nausée.

This is a difficult distinction to make, and in the last analysis it may be only of academic interest. Nevertheless, it is a real distinction and one which should be noted. Yossarian, in himself, does not consider his existence Absurd, at least not in the beginning. But by virtue of the fact that his world is functioning as Absurd, his role within it, and by extension his own existence, may have to be considered Absurd as well. Albert Camus confronts this apparent contradiction when he describes the Absurd as the "confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world....the Absurd is not in man (if such a metaphor could have a meaning) nor in the world,

but in their presence together."⁸¹ Since this "presence together" is the inescapable condition of existence it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to discuss man or his world separately.

Since man acts within the world it is in relation to this world that his actions are ascribed meaning. In Catch-22 the relationship between man and the world goes beyond unreasonable silence; it is totally antagonistic. It is a world in which the individual has become an anachronism. In this world one looks in vain for reason or meaningful motive behind even the most trivial action. Each action becomes its own justification in an endless circle of irrationality and inverted logic leading to a sense of total futility, impotence and entrapment. The negation of reason and the inversion of logic is so complete that the reader is seduced into accepting the apparent logic of metaphysical negation and irrationality. It is with a view to capturing the essence of this world that Heller's style is conceived. In the following pages the intention is to isolate examples of these techniques and to consider them within the overall context of the novel. Succeeding sections will concentrate on characterization and on the full significance of Heller's

⁸¹ The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays (1955), pp. 21, 23.

achievement.

"The most important device a novelist has to suggest an irrational world is, of course, the treatment of reason itself."⁸² The fundamental point to be made about Heller's technique is that his treatment of reason is not confined to rational operations--or lack of them--within the novel alone. His stylistic technique is conceived to challenge rational operations or "rationalist expectations" within the reader as well. Obviously, Heller is taking a good deal for granted in this. He is presuming that the preconceptions which the reader brings to the novel include certain notions concerning the fact that a novel should "tell a story" and should be written in a style which justifies Ian Watt's claim that "the function of language is much more largely referential in the novel than in other literary forms."⁸³ If we are to judge by the majority of the criticism which the novel has generated, it becomes clear that Heller's presumptions were, by and large, correct. Furthermore, Heller is prepared to grant Watt's contention "that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience,"⁸⁴ only if

⁸² Kennard, p. 84.

⁸³ The Rise of the Novel (1970), p. 31.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

the reader is prepared to re-evaluate his "rationalist expectations" concerning the nature of that human experience. To compel the reader to undertake such a re-evaluation, Heller uses a form and a style which undermine what the reader may rationally expect not only from a novel but from the human experience with which the novel is concerned. Heller has decided that while a rational world would demand a rational novel, an Absurd world demands an Absurd novel. It is because of this that Catch-22 "becomes an object which provides the reader with the experience of the Absurd."⁸⁵ Once again the reader is forced to choose: he is free to retain his view of the world and reject the view Heller proclaims. If he elects to do so, however, he must first reject what this novel proclaims about the novelistic form. The reader, like Yossarian, must also confront catch-22.

Behind all the confusion, futility, non-motivated action and meaninglessness stands catch-22, the prime device through which irrationality masquerades as reason in the novel. It is not by accident that no one definition of catch-22 is ever offered in the novel. What is so frustrating, as Yossarian learns, is that catch-22 may not even exist; it is enough that everyone

⁸⁵Kennard, p. 87.

thinks that it does. Because it is not written down and cannot be shown it is difficult to refute. Catch-22 becomes the ultimate manifestation of man-made rules of behaviour which frustrate every reasonable alternative. The rules that comprise catch-22 do not always contradict each other openly. The problem is that they "are continually inadequate to the occasion and always disregard the individual human life. They are intended to impose order upon chaos, but life so exceeds these rules that they only serve in the end to create more chaos."⁸⁶

Much of this contradictory logic is expressed in the novel by various sentence techniques which intrude continually into the narrative to "surprise" the reader. One type of sentence appears to be profoundly logical and reasonable when in fact it is quite the opposite. We learn that a new officers' club has been built on Pianosa and we come to accept the logic of Yossarian's evaluation of his role in its construction.

It was a truly splendid structure, and Yossarian throbbed with a mighty sense of accomplishment each time he gazed at it and reflected that none of the work that had gone into it was his.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 77.

⁸⁷ Catch-22, p. 18.

Colonel Cargill uses the same logic to address the men when he is encouraging their participation in the USO entertainment.

You're American officers. The officers of no other army in the world can make that statement. Think about it.⁸⁸

The opposite is also true. Sentences which first appear to be quite meaningless may be perfectly logical.

Yossarian informs the chaplain when they first meet and begin to get acquainted that:

I didn't know there were any other Captain Yossarians. As far as I know, I'm the only Captain Yossarian I know, but that's only as far as I know.⁸⁹

Such techniques are used to keep the reader confused and to confirm the thematic sense of an irrational world. Complex sentences appear where the clauses and phrases are not related to each other. One particular idea is not clarified by the clause which succeeds it and, in fact, each additional clause or phrase may simply add further complications. For example, we are led to believe in the following sentence that we will gain some new knowledge of McWatt:

McWatt wore fleecy bedroom slippers with his red pajamas and slept between freshly pressed colored bed-sheets like the one Milo had

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 27.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

retrieved half of for him from the grinning thief with the sweet tooth in exchange for none of the pitted dates Milo had borrowed from Yossarian.⁹⁰

Similarly, we get sentences like the following:

Immediately next door to Yossarian was Havermeyer, who liked peanut brittle and lived all by himself in the two man tent in which he shot tiny field mice every night with huge bullets from the .45 he had stolen from the dead man in Yossarian's tent.⁹¹

The reader may have to wait for pages or even chapters before clarification is given for any or all of the ideas contained in such sentences. Sometimes the wait is in vain for no real clarification is ever offered. At other times the reader is subjected to contradictory accounts of the same events. This latter is especially true of the history of Milo Minderbinder. The result of such a technique is to confound the reader's reliance on his own rational notions.

Two points are worth noting regarding this technique. The first is that there is nothing accidental or slipshod about it. The narrative sleight-of-hand conceals the fact that Heller is constructing a carefully conceived plan of absurdity (if such a metaphor could have a meaning), a plan which requires that even nonsense

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 59.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 17-18.

should make sense. Proof of the success of this method lies in the fact that the painstaking exercise which one would have to undertake to piece each scrap of information in a rational, referential, order would deflate the impression created by the novel as it is written. The second point to be noted is that these techniques undergo a change of emphasis as the novel progresses. Early in the novel they appear fast and furious with a view to establishing the tone, the frame of reference, with which Heller intends to work his theme. We learn, for example, that:

Colonel Cargill, General Peckem's trouble-shooter, was a forceful, ruddy man. Before the war he had been an alert, hard-hitting, aggressive marketing executive. He was a very bad marketing executive. Colonel Cargill was so awful a marketing executive that his services were much sought after by firms eager to establish losses for tax purposes....He was a self-made man who owed his lack of success to nobody.⁹²

Unlike Cargill, Major Major's father was a simple farmer who specialized in alfalfa.

His specialty was alfalfa, and he made a good thing out of not growing any. The government paid him well for every bushel of alfalfa he did not grow. The more alfalfa he did not grow, the more money the government gave him, and he spent every penny he didn't earn on new land to increase the amount of alfalfa he did not produce. Major Major's father worked without rest at not growing alfalfa.⁹³

⁹² Ibid., p. 27.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 82.

Once Heller has established this tone for the novel there is a decrease in the number of times such verbal twists occur, but when this technique appears in the later chapters it is with a marked change of emphasis. The comedy and slapstick take second place to a sense of nightmare; a sense of entrapment for the victims. The normal concept of the absurd, as simply ridiculous human actions, gives place to a sense of the Absurd, as defined by Camus. The gulf between victim and culprit, between the oppressed and the oppressors becomes increasingly wide and, for the former, it ceases to be a laughing matter. Thus when Scheisskopf arrives overseas and begins his rise to the top--an occurrence which, in itself, is symbolic of the triumph of stupidity--he is told by Peckem that parades are not permitted in a war zone. This is a great shock to Scheisskopf who has built his entire military life around parades. When he and Peckem devise a solution to his problem it has a sinister, almost diabolical abandon about it. The morified lunacy of the keepers is easily perceived through the surface humor. Scheisskopf asks:

"Can I schedule parades and then call them off?"
General Peckem brightened instantly. "Why, that's a wonderful idea! But just send out weekly announcements postponing the parades. Don't even bother to schedule them. That would be infinitely more disconcerting."⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 317.

Coming as it does at a time when Yossarian's efforts to stay alive require constant vigilance and when the world around him disintegrates at every turn, this is even more bizarre than Scheisskopf's plan back in training camp to have the men fastened to wooden beams in order to improve their parade formations. Similarly, a comparison of Clevinger's trial (Chapter VIII) with the trial of the chaplain (Chapter XXXVI) illustrates the shift which the novel undergoes as it progresses toward a sense of utter futility, total insanity, and the full nightmarish ramifications of catch-22. The same can be said regarding Cathcart's raising of the missions. In the early chapters there is usually some pretext behind his actions. In the later chapters the sense is created that Cathcart raises the missions "just for the hell of it." The strongest manifestation of this change of emphasis is in the form of the "odious deal" presented to Yossarian by Cathcart and Korn at the end of the novel. The presence of catch-22 has haunted the characters all through the novel but when it is presented now it is in the form of an absolute, iron-clad, annihilator ready to embrace its victim with all the gentleness of a steel trap.

The sense of futility and impotence is steadily increased as the novel progresses. For many of the high-ranking officers on Pianosa the war is waged with paper.

As Major Major discovers, the rule of thumb seems to be: the higher one's rank the more useless memoranda one signs and passes on. The result of this is that ex-PFC Wintergreen, a mail clerk through whose hands all memoranda pass, virtually controls the war effort single-handedly. It is worth noting in this context that by the end of the novel Milo, Cathcart and Korn, and Wintergreen have all joined forces to form a sort of cartel of craven power. One of the strongest images of human futility is witnessed by Yossarian during his night journey through the streets of Rome. He comes upon a young allied lieutenant having convulsions on the ground:

Six other soldiers from different countries wrestled with different parts of him, striving to help him and hold him still....All at once the wrestlers won and turned to each other undecidedly, for now that they held the young lieutenant rigid they did not know what to do with him. A quiver of moronic panic spread from one straining face to another. "Why don't you lift him up and put him on the hood of that car?" a corporal standing in back of Yossarian drawled. That seemed to make sense, so the seven men lifted the young lieutenant up and stretched him out carefully on the hood of a parked car, still pinning each struggling part of him down. Once they had him stretched out on the hood of the parked car, they stared at each other uneasily again, for they had no idea what to do with him next. "Why don't you lift him up off the hood of that car and lay him down on the ground?" drawled the same corporal behind Yossarian. That seemed like a good idea, too, and they began to move him back to the sidewalk....⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 404.

Non-motivated, irrational, zombie-like behaviour such as this is symptomatic of life in the world of Catch-22. Wintergreen summarizes the attitude when, while engaged in digging holes and filling them in again, he reminds Yossarian sagely that it is all "a matter of duty...and we each have our duty to perform."⁹⁶ He is content with the fact that his duty is to dig holes and then fill them in again. He is so content that each time there are no more holes to be dug he goes AWOL so as to be assigned to digging holes again. Digging holes at the training camp is not such a bad life in war time he observes philosophically. And he continues by observing that:

"My duty is to keep digging these holes....The duty of the men in combat is to win the war, and I just wish they were doing their duty as well as I've been doing mine. It wouldn't fair if I had to go overseas and do their job too, would it."⁹⁷

Duty, of course, is the crux of the problem: whom or what is duty owed? In a traditional scheme of things it was usually possible to conclude such a discussion by eventually reverting to the concept of the divine order or some such certainty. In the world of Catch-22 no such divine order is manifest and the question

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 104.

⁹⁷Ibid.

of a God is hardly relevant. It is a fact that the God-concept lingers in the shadows in the form of distorted images. Colonel Cathcart is willing to use God as a publicity stunt, Major Major's father is fond of quoting scripture to support aid to farmers, and the God in whom Lieutenant Scheisskopf's wife so adamantly does not believe "is a good God, a just God, a merciful God."⁹⁸

As far as Yossarian is concerned, if there is a God "He's not working at all. He's playing. Or else He's forgotten all about us."⁹⁹ Even the chaplain is beginning to question his faith in "the wisdom and justice of an immortal, omnipotent, omniscient, humane, universal, anthropomorphic, English-speaking, Anglo-Saxon, pro-American God."¹⁰⁰ Dunbar, on the other hand, is more positive: "There is no God."¹⁰¹ The only authority symbols left are the lunatics like the officers of the Pianosa High Command, abstractions like patriotism, and the God of Milo Minderbinder. If, for a moment, one might be considering the relative value of such Gods, the Old Man in the Roman whorehouse gives the lie to each of them.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 179.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 279.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 123.

The result is that life is reduced to words; words which have lost all meaning. General Peckem is fastidious to a fault in matters of taste and style and possesses a large vocabulary, but he has lost all sense of what words mean. Yossarian senses deeply this loss of language and in a scene describing an educational session Heller uses language to illustrate its own lack of capability. Yossarian attends these educational sessions in the hope that he will learn something about why so many people are trying to kill him.

A handful of other men were also interested, and the questions were many and good when Clevinger and the subversive corporal finished and made the mistake of asking if there were any.

"Who is Spain?"

"Why is Hitler?"

"When is right?"

"Where was that stooped and mealy-colored old man I used to call Poppa when the merry-go-round broke down?"

"How was trump at Munich?"

"Ho-ho beriberi."

and

"Balls!"

all rang out in rapid succession, and then there was Yossarian with the question that had no answer:

"Where are the Snowden's of yesteryear?"¹⁰²

When the corporal informs Yossarian that he does not have the answer, Yossarian declares himself "ready to pursue him through all the words in the world to wring the knowledge from him if he could." As Frederick Karl

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 34-35.

points out, "words themselves become a kind of language midway between evocation and denotation.... So often misunderstood, his [Heller's] language would not of course fit a rational theme--it is itself an attempt to convey a world beyond the logic of the word."¹⁰³

Yossarian's censoring games when he is in the hospital provide the first extended example of this in the novel.

A world which can no longer be explained by reason becomes a strange world, what Buber calls an "alien scene." As long as reason remains, however faulty or inadequate it might be, the world remains a familiar place. Without reason as a referential quality man becomes l'étranger. When reason disappears or ceases to function, order and priority cease to have meaning as well. There remains no ultimate reason for doing one thing rather than another. Thus, it makes just as much sense for Milo to contract with the enemy to bomb his own men--at cost plus six percent--as it does for these same men to bomb other countries in the name of something called patriotism or the war effort. Chief White Halfoat explains this to Captain Flume:

¹⁰³ Contemporary American Novelists, p. 142.

Captain Flume was obsessed with the idea that Chief White Halfoat would tiptoe up to his cot one night when he was sound asleep and slit his throat open for him from ear to ear. Captain Flume had obtained this idea from Chief White Halfoat himself, who did tiptoe up to his cot one night as he was dozing off, to hiss portentously that one night when he, Captain Flume, was sound asleep he, Chief White Halfoat, was going to slit his throat open for him from ear to ear. Captain Flume turned to ice, his eyes, flung open wide, staring directly up into Chief White Halfoat's, glinting drunkenly only inches away.

"Why?" Captain Flume managed to croak finally.

"Why not?" was Chief White Halfoat's answer.¹⁰⁴

Once Heller has established this tone of uncertainty, the reader begins to feel a certain bewildered kinship with Captain Flume. Why, he may ask, is the world of Catch-22 so chaotic and confused regarding questions of time, space, character and motive, and why does the form of the novel reflect the chaos it describes? The answer which the novel provides is why not?

Once all definable certainties are called into question the individual cannot even be sure of his own identity. Several instances which illustrate the effect of this (the Soldier in White, the involvement of Yossarian and Dunbar with Homer Lumley and A. Fortiori in the hospital, the multiple titles of Milo Minderbinder) have already been noted. But Major Major is the most

¹⁰⁴ Catch-22, p. 56.

representative of the problem. Major Major had the unfortunate luck to be born with a sickly resemblance to Henry Fonda and to have a father who was a practical joker.

The fact that he had been born Major Major Major was a secret known only to his father. Not until Major Major was enrolling in kindergarten was the discovery of his real name made, and then the effects were disastrous. The news killed his mother, who just lost her will to live and wasted away and died....

On Major Major himself the consequences were only slightly less severe. It was a harsh and stunning realization that was forced upon him at so tender an age, the realization that he was not, as he had always been led to believe, Caleb Major, but instead was some total stranger named Major Major Major about whom he knew absolutely nothing and about whom nobody else had ever heard before. What playmates he had withdrew from him and never returned, disposed, as they were, to distrust all strangers, especially one who had already deceived them by pretending to be someone they had known for years.¹⁰⁵

When Yossarian and his friends rescue Natelly's Whore from the officers in the Roman whorehouse one of the officers congratulates them on having thrown all the officers' uniforms out the window. "That was clever. We'll never be able to convince anybody we're superior without our uniforms."¹⁰⁶ Even such an essential concept as identity has become definable only in terms of uniforms, "dog tags," insignia and other external characteristics.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 348.

As a result of this undermining of traditional rules of behaviour, the incredible or illogical becomes commonplace. Heller's technique of describing situations and events which at first appear to be familiar and recognizable but which are eventually exaggerated to the point of absurdity confirms this. This technique invites comparison with that used by Lewis Carroll in Alice in Wonderland. A brief study of this similarity has been published.¹⁰⁷ Milo is introduced as the type of soldier, common to war novels, who is not above making a personal profit out of war. But his exploits are expanded, at first gradually and then at a frenzied pace, until he becomes a grotesque symbol of unleashed greed and power. Captain Black's "Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade" begins as a simple exercise in over-zealous patriotism, but things tend to get out of hand.

To Captain Black, every officer who supported his Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade was a competitor, and he planned and plotted twenty-four hours a day to keep one step ahead. He would stand second to none in his devotion to country. When other officers had followed his urging and introduced loyalty oaths of their own, he went them one better by making every son of a bitch who came to his intelligence tent sign two loyalty oaths, then three, then four; then he introduced the pledge of allegiance, and after that "The Star-Spangled Banner," one

¹⁰⁷ See Caroline Gordon and Jeanne Richardson, "Flies in Their Eyes: A Note on Joseph Heller's Catch-22," Southern Review, 3:1 (January, 1967), pp. 96-105.

chorus, two choruses, three choruses, four choruses. Each time they followed his example, he retreated with scorn and racked his brain for some new stratagem that would enable him to turn upon them scornfully again.¹⁰⁸

The result is that virtually all activity is brought to a stand-still on Pianosa. The only noticeable activity becomes long lines of men singing, swearing, and pledging before they are given their meals or permitted to take part in any other activity. Into this frantic scene strides Major----de Coverley who finds himself barred from the mess hall by long lines of singing, swearing, and pledging men. With two words: "Gimme eat," he causes Captain Black's crusade to come crashing down around him.

No one can explain why the major should have such an effect, just as no one can explain that mysterious blank in his name. The relationship between Chief White Halfoat's family and the oil companies is treated in the same way (Chapter V).

Heller uses a shock technique to enforce this sense of an "alien scene" and to confound the reader's expectations. It is usually the tone, a tone that is casual, matter-of-fact, and flippant, which creates this reversal. Notely, for example, "had a bad start. He came from a good family."¹⁰⁹ References to The Texan,

¹⁰⁸ Catch-22, p. 112.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

Colonel Cargill, and others, which have already been cited, are examples of this as well. This disparity between tone and subject matter is best exploited in some of the most horrific scenes in the novel. Lieutenant Scheisskopf's plan to ensure perfect parade formations has already been noted. The spectacle of ranks of marching men bolted to wooden beams is followed by an explanation of why the plan was not put into effect.

The plan was not feasible, for making a ninety-degree turn would have been impossible without nickel-alloy swivels inserted in the small of every man's back, and Lieutenant Scheisskopf was not sanguine at all about obtaining that many nickel-alloy swivels from Quartermaster or enlisting the cooperation of the surgeons in the hospital.¹¹⁰

Similarly, when Yossarian bursts into Aarfy's room after the latter has just raped and murdered the servant girl, he screams the enormity of the crime at Aarfy and wonders why a girl from the street would not have served Aarfy's purposes. Aarfy smiles blandly and counters with a cliché: "I never paid for it in my life."¹¹¹

The most notable example of this technique occurs in the description of the death of Kid Sampson. This passage is worth quoting in full because, apart from being

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 72.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 408.

an example of the shock technique, it is one of the best examples of the tone which pervades the novel and, along with the final description of Snowden's death, is one of the best pieces of writing in the book. The scene begins with Yossarian on the beach with Nurse Duckett. It is a beautiful, peaceful day and he amuses himself with thoughts of her warm body, and gazes carelessly at the fishing boats out on the tide. It is a nostalgic moment and his thoughts drift back to the memory of his dead friends, Orr and Clevinger. Death and the sea trigger the memory of that other fateful day on which Kid Sampson had died, and into the middle of this peaceful reverie Heller introduces the full story surrounding Kid Sampson's death.

[Yossarian] studied every floating object fearfully for some gruesome sign of Clevinger and Orr, prepared for any morbid shock but the shock McWatt gave him one day with the plane that came blasting suddenly into sight out of the distant stillness and hurtled mercilessly along the shore line with a great growling, clattering roar over the bobbing raft on which blond, pale Kid Sampson, his naked, sides scrawney even from so far away, leaped clownishly up to touch it at the exact moment some arbitrary gust of wind or minor miscalculation of McWatt's senses dropped the speeding plane just low enough for a propeller to slice him half away.

...There was the briefest, softest tst! filtering audibly through the shattering, overwhelming howl of the plane's engines, and then there were just Kid Sampson's two pale, skinny legs, still joined by strings somehow at the bloody truncated hips, standing stock still on

the raft for what seemed a full minute or two before they toppled over backward into the water finally with a faint, echoing splash and turned completely upside down so that only the grotesque toes and the plaster-white soles of Kid Sampson's feet remained in view.¹¹²

Hysteria breaks out on the shore as Kid Sampson "rained" all over the beach and its occupants. However, in the midst of the confusion it becomes clear that Doc Daneeka is officially listed on McWatt's flight log. Officially, Doc Daneeka is aboard the plane. An absurd scene is developed in which the people on the beach wait patiently for Doc Daneeka to parachute to safety while Daneeka stands beside them vehemently protesting his presence. By this change of tone Heller distracts attention away from Kid Sampson but more importantly attention is drawn away from McWatt, who has taken his plane into a steady climb. Everyone in the plane parachutes except McWatt and Doc Daneeka. The attention of the people on the beach is caught up in wondering why "they" don't jump as well.

But Yossarian understood suddenly why McWatt wouldn't jump, and went running uncontrollably down the whole length of the squadron after McWatt's plane, waving his arms and shouting up at him imploringly to come down, McWatt, come down; but no one seemed to hear, certainly not McWatt, and a great, choking moan tore from Yossarian's throat as McWatt turned again, dipped

¹¹² Ibid., p. 331.

his wings once in salute, decided oh, well,
 what the hell, and flew into a mountain.¹¹³

But Heller is not content with a simple change of tone; he insists on pounding his theme home. In a final sentence which ends the chapter Heller puts both deaths into thematic perspective:

Colonel Cathcart was so upset by the deaths of Kid Sampson and McWatt that he raised the missions to sixty-five.¹¹⁴

It would be possible in a discussion of Catch-22 to ignore the obvious: on the surface it is a very funny book. Even in the scene just cited the humor is present. Yet, in the final analysis, the humor must be seen as peripheral. The final impression is one of horror, not of laughter. Humor is seldom used in the novel for its own sake alone. The humor is part of an ulterior purpose; a purpose which Heller explains when he says that he "tried consciously for a comic effect juxtaposed with the tragic, working the frivolous in with the catastrophic. I wanted people to laugh and then look back with horror at what they were laughing at."¹¹⁵ Obviously, if one can judge from the critical reaction to the novel, Heller got

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 333.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Mademoiselle (August 1963), p. 234.

the effect he wanted and for many critics the realization of what was taking place was not a pleasant sensation.

"Many reacted with what can only be called outrage, almost as if the mixture of tragic and comic elements violated some sacred purity of form the presence of which is one of our most cherished guarantees that art will not bring us too close to life. In a sense Heller got from these readers the response he was looking for: the realization, as their laughter subsided, that what they were laughing at was their own absurd world."¹¹⁶

Any extended discussion of the comic element in Catch-22 would certainly be redundant. Even a superficial reading of the novel illustrates abundantly its use of the comic. What is important is that the necessity of the humor be understood. Heller knows that without the facade of nonsense, it would have been difficult for him to express, and more difficult for the reader to bear, "his bitter, Swiftian anguish."¹¹⁷ But the humor serves another function as well, a thematic function. Bergson suggests that laughter is caused by an incongruity, by "something mechanical encrusted on the

¹¹⁶Hunt, p. 92.

¹¹⁷Littlejohn, p. 259.

living,"¹¹⁸ which frustrates our expectations about what is normal. Thus, in Catch-22, the humor, along with the other techniques already described, is used to challenge the reader's expectations.

Finally, it must be noted that Heller's deliberate linking of the comic with the grotesque makes it difficult for the reader to "laugh-off" the uncomfortable doubts which the novel generates. Heller's own doubts about "the sanity of society" have been noted above. His humor reflects these doubts and like that of the satirist it is a humor that springs from fear.

Heller's comedy is not that which protects and enhances our self-esteem, or unites us with the race in a warm chuckle at the foibles of mankind; it is not a comedy which can be used as a defense mechanism. His humor is that of so many other modern writers, a humor which is "macabre and appalling, but may be the only humor left to the honest man; if we are all to fry together...it can hardly hurt to laugh first at our own lunacy."¹¹⁹ But such a laugh very easily becomes a scream of terror.

The conclusion to which we are led by a consideration of Heller's stylistic techniques is that

¹¹⁸ Comedy (1956), ed. Sypher, p. 84.

¹¹⁹ John M. Muste, "Better to Die Laughing: The War Novels of Joseph Heller and John Ashmead," Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction, 5:2 (1962), p. 27.

Catch-22 attempts to communicate, both by what it proclaims and the method used to proclaim it, a concept and an experience of the Absurd nature of man's existence. In an Absurd world where reason, order, motive, action and meaning--all the concepts which give a center to that existence--have become hollow words and where death is the only clear and unmistakable reality, the only value left to the individual is the value of the self. An examination of Heller's characters in relation to this theme will illustrate that of the gallery of characters who people this novel only those who take the anxiety of this existence into "the courage to be as oneself" retain even the fundamental notions of what may have been meant by "humanity" before "overcivilization and dehumanization" caused the history of man to "be written as a history of the alienation of man."¹²⁰

iv. Some inhabitants of the ledges.

Characterization in Catch-22, like the structure and the stylistic method, has been considered wanting by most of the critics. The anonymous reviewer for Daedalus may be quoted as an example of the general negative

¹²⁰ Erich Kahler, The Tower and the Abyss: An Inquiry into the Transformation of Man (Viking, 1967), pp. xiii and 43.

comment on this aspect of the novel. It is worth noting before proceeding further that reviewers should not always be held fully accountable for their hastily written words. Yet, a large number of the reviews cited in this paper appeared more than a year after the novel's publication. Furthermore, in this instance, the review of Catch-22 is but one of six which were printed, according to the editors of the periodical, "to encourage the idea that book reviewing is not a lost art...but only one that has been neglected."¹²¹ The reviewer proceeds to write a rather long review--ten double column pages--which, if we are to judge by the tone, is offered as a definitive piece on the subject. In fact, the reviewer makes it clear that not only has he read the novel but also the bulk of criticism which had appeared up to that time.

His comment on Heller's characterization is worth quoting in full because it is an example of what characterization in Catch-22 is not and provides a point of departure for a discussion of what Heller's method actually is.

¹²¹Daedalus (Winter, 1963), p. 155.

There are no characters. The puppets are given funny names and features, but cannot be visualized or distinguished from one another except by association with their prototypes. Sergeant Bilko, Colonel Blimp (and Captain Whizbang) are immanent and circumambient, their spirit, like Yossarian in his plane, moving over the face of the waters. The character-names range from the subtly whimsical (General Dreedle) to the mercilessly side-splitting (Milo Minderbinder and Dori Duz, who, as Mr. Heller and his publishers carefully explain, "does"). Alliteration is rife: General P.P. Peckem, Colonel Cargill, Colonel Korn, Major Metcalf. One character surnamed "Major" has received from his cruel father the given name "Major" and since he is now a Major in the army, he is Major Major Major. He must have picked up a middle name when my attention lagged since one of Mr. Heller's chapters is titled "Major Major Major Major" at which point our laughter becomes uncontrollable. In this world, of course, Texans are bores, Iowans rubes, chaplains feeble, doctors hypochondriac, and officers increasingly contemptible as they rise in rank until we reach generals, who are effete. The copying of every available stereotype, and the failure to find in the whole range of humanity anything new to draw illustrates the author's indifference to people. We can see no one because he has seen no one.¹²²

While this view is extreme it is characteristic of the general hostility of these reviewers and illustrates the need for a re-examination of Heller's technique. No extended comment on the particular points raised by the critic need be made since the discussion which follows effectively demonstrates the falsity of his argument. One can scarcely help but remark, however, that there is a

¹²²Ibid., pp. 158-59.

certain poetic justice in the critic's claim that he and Scheisskopf are indeed "brothers under the skin."¹²³ Apparently, the reviewer's broad erudition does not include a familiarity with German.

On the surface, a few of the points made by this critic contain a certain literal accuracy. It is indeed true that the majority of Heller's characters are representative of types. What this reviewer fails to realize is that such a method is eminently suited to the nature of the book Heller has written. Reference has already been made to the similarity of Catch-22, in certain particulars, to what Northrop Frye calls the "anatomy." A consideration of Heller's characterization in this context goes a long way toward explaining his method. But it does not fully account for his approach. Several of the characters in the novel, especially Yossarian and those who are his intimates, are much more than representative types. This is not to say, however, that they can be considered as traditional naturalistic character studies. Furthermore, it is to be noted that in some instances the characters are parodies of the type they represent.¹²⁴

¹²³Ibid., p. 159.

¹²⁴Denniston, p. 53.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that several of the characters are stylized along "humor" lines, another aspect of the "anatomy."¹²⁵ In this Heller is working a variation on a concept explained by Jonson in the "Introduction" to Every Man Out of His Humor (1599) when he notes that:

Some one particular quality
Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,
In their confluents, all to run one way.

Such a portrayal of character has been traditional in parody and satire. The satirist portrays characters in this way not because "he has seen no one" but because he has seen a great deal; he has seen behind the mask of rationality which humanity wears. This is what Swift had in mind when he defined man as an animal capable of reason. Frye offers a summary of this method and at the same time points out how it differs from the method of characterization common to the traditional naturalistic, non-satirical novel.

The Menippean satire deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes. Pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds, are handled in terms of their occupational approach to life as distinct from their social behavior. The Menippean satire...

¹²⁵ Anatomy of Criticism, p. 312.

differs from the novel in its characterization, which is stylized rather than naturalistic, and presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent.¹²⁶

There is, however, another aspect of Heller's characterization which is more appropriate to the method of writing which has been ascribed to Heller so far. It is a method common to much contemporary fiction and is not directly related to the satiric mode, except in the sense that practically all modern fiction is to a greater or lesser degree satirical. This is a method of characterization which is directly related to the portrayal of the absurd man. It is a method of characterization best suited to the presentation of man as one who inhabits an alien world. As Camus explains, the response which the absurd man makes to life "is not a matter of explaining and solving, but of experiencing and describing." He goes on to say that the work of art which attempts to deal with the absurd man, with the Absurd, becomes "a sort of monotonous and passionate repetition of the themes already orchestrated by the world."¹²⁷ It is pointless to demand that characters

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 309.

¹²⁷ The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 70.

in fiction which proclaims the Absurd view of the world be "recognizable" in the way we would expect them to be if they were products of a supposed rational order.

Robbe-Grillet suggests that the idea that a character should have a proper name, heredity, parents, a profession, possessions, and a personality which permits the reader to love or hate him, is a notion which deals with an age that has passed: an age "which marked the apogee of the individual." He goes on to say that,

Perhaps this is not an advance, but it is evident that the present period is rather one of administrative numbers. The world's destiny has ceased, for us, to be identified with the rise and fall of certain men, of certain families. The world itself is no longer our private property, hereditary and convertible into cash, a prey which is not so much a matter of knowing as conquering.¹²⁸

Whether a value judgement is necessary here is not the point at issue. The point is that such is the theory and practice of many contemporary novelists and the criticism of this fiction cannot cling blindly to principles laid down for another age and another sensibility.

It has already been demonstrated that Heller is dealing with an Absurd, totally bureaucratic, impersonal

¹²⁸ For A New Novel, pp. 26-29.

world; a world in which the individual is a stranger. That this is the condition of the present age--in fact as well as in literature, if the distinction must be made--is evidenced by the attention it receives in writings on philosophy, psychology, sociology, and theology, as well as in most contemporary fiction and drama. It is a view which sees alienation as the birthright of modern man. Heller is concerned, in terms of character portrayal, with presenting a wide gallery of those who inhabit this Absurd void. For the most part, his characters are combinations of the character-type and the unaware "lost souls" who think they operate in a world which they understand and mold and who live under the illusion that action, any action, is its own justification and thereby justification for life in general. They are the direct descendants of the Hollow Men; the tillers of the Wasteland. It is not by accident that no one on Pianosa knows who T.S. Eliot is.¹²⁹ In such a world each man is everyman. "Heller's huge cast of characters, therefore, is dominated by a large number of comic malignities, genus Americanus, drawn with a grotesqueness so audacious that they...transcend caricature entirely and become

¹²⁹Catch-22, pp. 36-37.

vividly authentic."¹³⁰

Against all of these generalities stands Yossarian. "His very name is different when one considers that there are probably more white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant names in Catch-22 than all of Newport's social register."¹³¹ He proclaims the value of the self in a world that is fast becoming a gigantic syndicate sustained by its own slogans and closed upon itself. He is the embodiment of the rebel--l'homme révolté, as defined by

Camus:

A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes, from the moment he makes his first gesture of rebellion. A slave who has taken orders all his life suddenly decides he cannot obey some new command.¹³²

In so judging his own worth and in so ordering his own response to the world, Yossarian proclaims the essence of what it means to be human. "Like Grass" Oscar [Yossarian] is a kind of last man--a sum total of humanness...in a world where men have imprisoned themselves."¹³³ This, of

¹³⁰Brustein, p. 12.

¹³¹Pinsker, p. 152.

¹³²The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt (1965), p. 13.

¹³³Nadine Gordimer, "Party of One," Holiday (July, 1963), p. 16.

course, may be the most absurd response of all, but it is surely the only valid response which remains if we are to grant to man any possibility of retaining a sense of personal dignity.

In the world of Catch-22 the characters fall into two categories: the aggressors and the victims. Constance Denniston points this out but limits her analysis to the confines of the American romance-parody.¹³⁴ Ritter has drawn up lines of battle, as it were, to put each character in his proper category.¹³⁵ Among the aggressors he lists: Aardvaark, Appleby, Black, Danby, Korn, Dreedle, Havermeyer, Minderbinder, Wintergreen, Peckem and Scheisskopf. Also on the side of the aggressors are military and civilian police, lawyers, and government officials. Among the victims we find: Clevinger, Daneeka, Dunbar, Flume, Halfoat, Hungry Joe, Kid Sampson, Luciana, McWatt, Major Major, Mudd, Orr, Nately, his Whore, and her Kid Sister, the Old Man, Tappan, and Yossarian. The majority of the victims die during the course of the novel (those whose names are underlined). To the list of those who die a physical death might be added Doc Daneeka who dies "officially" and Dunbar who is "disappeared."

¹³⁴ Emporia State Research Studies, 14:2 (1965), p. 53.

¹³⁵ Fearful Comedy (1968), p. 24.

Heller's technique is to introduce each character in two or three sentences which appear to sum up his personality, but which usually are collections of contradictions. Thus, we learn that Colonel Cathcart was

a slick, successful, slipshod, unhappy man of thirty-six who lumbered when he walked and wanted to be a general. He was dashing and dejected, poised and chagrined. He was complacent and insecure, daring in the administrative stratagems he employed to bring himself to the attention of his superiors and craven in his concern that his schemes might all backfire.¹³⁶

Gradually we are given the facts about each character until we reach a point of absurdity where all the traits merge as one obsession or the character becomes a complete pawn in a system over which he has no control and which is slowly and methodically divesting him of every human quality. The characters may not be complete in the traditional sense, but there is no doubt that they are real. It would be a contradiction to find a highly individualized character in a world which does not recognize individuality. Heller is concerned with presenting a picture of a world gone mad. Even the large number of characters contributes to this effect. People have reality not in themselves but in relation to the idea the world has of them.

¹³⁶Catch-22, p. 185.

A complete and individualized character would be an aberration in this world. This is why Yossarian, who insists, like Winston Smith in 1984, on proclaiming his uniqueness, bothers Colonel Cathcart so much:

Yossarian--the very sight of the name made him shudder. There were so many esses in it. It just had to be subversive. It was like the word subversive itself. It was like sedition, and insidious too, and like socialist, suspicious, fascist and Communist. It was an odious, alien, distasteful name, a name that just did not inspire confidence. It was not at all like such clean, crisp, honest, American names as Cathcart, Peckem and Dreedle.¹³⁷

It is a significant comment on the world of Catch-22 that the qualities which make Yossarian an individual are the same qualities which cause him to be branded as a misfit, a lunatic.

Many of the characters have names which indicate, in the Jonsonian manner, their chief traits. Their names are their public masks and in this world only the masks have reality. Furthermore, several characters may be seen as possessing archetypal or mythic significance as well. A detailed analysis of the more than seventy characters in the novel would be a totally unnecessary exercise; it would impose a category on this study that is not within the scope of its intentions. What is useful is a consideration of

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 207.

some of the more representative characters among the victims and aggressors, culminating in a close examination of Yossarian.

Hungry Joe lives in a state of purgatorial existence. He is a veteran who has flown six combat tours by the time Cathcart begins raising the required number of missions. He is elated each time he finishes a tour of duty and immediately packs his bags to await discharge papers. The papers never arrive. Each time the missions are raised again, Hungry Joe is glad to get back into combat, the fear of death being no worse than the agony of a life spent waiting for that which is never realized. As a result, Hungry Joe is reduced to "an eaten shell of a human building rocking seriously on the brink of collapse."¹³⁸ He begins to have terrifying nightmares which are all the more terrifying because the nightmares are always the same. He always dreams that he is being suffocated by a cat sleeping on his face. The truth of the matter is that Huple's cat is always to be found sleeping on Hungry Joe's face. The fact that Hungry Joe could have the same nightmare every night puzzled Yossarian at first; such an occurrence did not seem to make any sense at all.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 53.

And suddenly it all made sense. Why not every night, indeed? It made sense to cry out in pain every night. It made more sense than Appleby, who was a stickler for regulations and had ordered Kraft to order Yossarian to take his Atabrine tablets....Hungry Joe made more sense than Kraft, too, who was dead, dumped uncereemoniously into doom over Ferrara....¹³⁹

The point is a simple and a brutal one. In a world where nothing makes sense, one occurrence makes as much sense as another.

Even after the epic fist fight between Hungry Joe and the cat when Hungry Joe is declared the winner because the cat had "fled from Hungry Joe ignominiously like a yellow dog," Joe goes to bed victoriously only to dream again "that Huple's cat was sleeping on his face, suffocating him."¹⁴⁰ His nightmares are contagious and soon other men in the squadron begin to have nightmares of their own until "the piercing obscenities they flung into the air every night from their separate places in the squadron rang against each other in the darkness romantically like the mating calls of songbirds with filthy minds."¹⁴¹

Before the war Hungry Joe had been a photographer for Life magazine. He attempts to carry on his profession

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 128-29.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 53.

by taking pictures of naked women. Whenever the opportunity presents itself, however, Hungry Joe reaches such a frantic state of sexual excitement that he invariably fails. He can never make up his mind as to whether he should photograph women or make love to them.

Like everything else about his this aspect of his character presents a picture of utter frustration. "The pictures never came out and Hungry Joe never got in."¹⁴²

True to his name, Hungry Joe is the embodiment of unfulfilled desires, the insatiable appetite, the Id. He is the source of much comedy and satire in the novel but he is also the image of a human being who has been reduced to a nonentity. Even his death is not his own; he dies as predicted by his nightmares. He is found dead in his sleep with a cat on his face.

Chaplain Tappan ("fumbling man") is one of the few characters who represent a potential for good in the novel. He is, at one and the same time, one of the most aware and one of the most naive men on Pianosa. His analysis of the Absurd, the concept of déjà vu, and his comments on the human condition suggest comparison with Roquentin in Sartre's La Nausee. He is a troubled man who questions the nature of his existence continually.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 52.

It was already some time since the chaplain had first begun wondering what everything was all about. Was there a God? How could he be sure? ...He was pinched perspiringly in the epistemological dilemma of the skeptic, unable to accept solutions to problems he was unwilling to dismiss as unsolvable. He was never without misery, and never without hope.¹⁴³

He is completely subsumed by his title which marks him as Shylock is marked by his Jewishness. Yet he is continually aware of the fact that he has a relevance and a value beyond it. In the chaplain's estimation of his own position we are given a good example of Heller's parodying the form he is using, yet contained within it as well is a pathetic picture of naked humanity striving for recognition.

No one...seemed really to appreciate that he, Chaplain Albert Taylor Tappman, was not just a chaplain but a human being, that he could have a charming, passionate, pretty wife whom he loved almost insanely and three small blue-eyed children with strange forgotten faces who would grow up someday to regard him as a freak and who might never forgive him for all the social embarrassment his vocation would cause them. Why couldn't anybody understand that he was not really a freak but a normal, lonely adult trying to live a normal, lonely adult life? If they pricked him, didn't he bleed? And if he was tickled, didn't he laugh? It seemed never to have occurred to them that he, just as they, had eyes, hands, organs, dimensions, senses and affections, that he was wounded by the same kind of weapons they were, warmed and cooled by the

¹⁴³Ibid., pp. 262-63.

same breezes and fed by the same kind of food, although, he was forced to concede, in a different mess hall for each successive meal.¹⁴⁴

Because he is so sincere, open and concerned about others the chaplain is held in contempt even by his own orderly, the sarcastic Corporal Whitcomb, and his potential for good is never realized. He lives in mortal fear, even of people with loud voices, and is totally ineffectual. Like Don Quixote, "the chaplain was sincerely a very helpful person who was never able to help anyone."¹⁴⁵ His main problems are his kindness and good manners toward others, qualities which have only negative potential in a world where the first duty must be to the self, to personal survival. The image of the chaplain is the image of a good and gentle man who is incapable of becoming a force for good because he is unable to comprehend the monstrous capability for evil which exists in his fellow man. Part clown and part saint, he lacks the insight, courage and cunning of the rebel. His naivete causes him to wrestle with mighty problems of ontology while he ignores, or at least fails to come to terms with, the very real manifestations of non-reason going on all around him.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 265.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 267.

It is for this reason that the chaplain fares so badly as a character toward the end of the novel. The bravado he exhibits in support of Yossarian's decision to desert is all the more pathetic because it is easily recognized as childish bravado and nothing more.

"Run away to Sweden, Yossarian. And I'll stay here and persevere. Yes. I'll persevere. I'll nag and badger Colonel Cathcart and Colonel Korn every time I see them. I'm not afraid. I'll even pick on General Dreedle."¹⁴⁶

The role of the nagging prophet does not sit well with the chaplain. Even his language betrays his reliance on religion and, like the religion he represents, the chaplain is irrelevant and inconsequential in this Absurd world.

Along with the chaplain, Natelly ("new born"), Orr (whose name may be related to the method of his escape, by rowing; or, it could represent the other half of the "either/or" dilemma), and Dunbar form the circle of characters closest to Yossarian. They are Yossarian's alter ego fragmented into different facets of his character. Natelly, as his name suggests, is the innocent who is both pitied and parodied. He represents, along with Clevinger, the rationalist point of view. But he also represents civilized, cultured man--too naive to realize the value of his own life and too stupid to protect it.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 441.

His nature was invariably gentle and polite. He had lived for almost twenty years without trauma, tension, hate, or neurosis, which was proof to Yossarian of just how crazy he really was. His childhood had been a pleasant, though disciplined, one. He got on well with his brothers and sisters, and he did not hate his mother and father, even though they had both been very good to him.¹⁴⁷

Nately's family had always known riches. His mother who was "a Daughter of the American Revolution," reminded him frequently that unlike the other rich families of America, who had made their fortunes in petroleum and tobacco, "the Nately's have never done anything for their money." His father who was "a Son of a Bitch," was quick to add that "the newly rich are never to be esteemed as highly as the newly poor."¹⁴⁸ When the war broke out Nately's family had decided that he should enlist because he was too young to be placed in the diplomatic service, and because his father had it on good authority that the war would not last very long.

Nately is a living parody of the American dream. But he is also a sensitive young man who finds himself hopelessly in love with a lush young Roman whore. Their love affair is at once a parody of the "war-time romance" and a tribute to Nately's genuine innocence and humanity.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 243.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

The importance of Nately as an image of human worth in a world gone mad is seen by the reaction to his death. It is worthy of note that this scene is reported through the sensitive eyes of the chaplain. He (the chaplain) rushes to the field when he hears the news of more men being killed on a mission.

At the field a heavy silence prevailed, overpowering motion like a ruthless, insensate spell holding in thrall the only beings who might break it. The chaplain was in awe. He had never beheld such a great, appalling stillness before. Almost two hundred tired, gaunt, downcast men stood holding their parachute packs in a somber and unstirring crowd outside the briefing room, their faces staring blankly in different angles of stunned dejection. They seemed unwilling to go, unable to move. The chaplain was acutely conscious of the faint noise his footsteps made as he approached. His eyes searched hurriedly, frantically, through the immobile maze of limp figures. He spied Yossarian finally with a feeling of immense joy, and then his mouth gaped open slowly in unbearable horror as he noted Yossarian's vivid, beaten, grimy look of deep, drugged despair. He understood at once, recoiling in pain from the realization and shaking his head with a protesting and imploring grimace, that Nately was dead. The knowledge struck him with a numbing shock. A sob broke from him. The blood drained from his legs, and he thought he was going to drop. Nately was dead. All hope that he was mistaken was washed away by the sound of Nately's name emerging with recurring clarity now from the almost inaudible babble of murmuring voices that he was suddenly aware of for the first time. Nately was dead: the boy had been killed.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 371.

The sentimental quality of this passage is deliberate for before the chaplain can manage to get to Yossarian's side and share his grief several burly policemen cart him (the chaplain) away to be questioned concerning the Washington Irving mystery. The same blind power to which Natelly has fallen victim now descends on the chaplain with all its might.

Dunbar comes closest to Yossarian in both mind and action. He is a past master at malingering and has a few tricks that are worthy of Yossarian himself. Next to Yossarian and, of course, Orr, he comes closest to understanding the duty to the self and the value of survival. His favorite activity is working at increasing his life span. He finds that cultivating boredom and performing odious actions are excellent in this regard.

Dunbar loved shooting skeet because he hated every minute of it and the time passed so slowly. He had figured out that a single hour on the skeet-shooting range with people like Havermeier and Appleby could be worth as much as eleven-times-seventeen years.¹⁵⁰

With great patience, Dunbar tries to explain his philosophy to Clevinger. The latter remains unconvinced; he is willing to admit that life may have to include many unpleasant conditions if it is to seem long, but he can not understand why anyone would want a long life in this

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

case. When Dunbar persists, Clevinger asks why life should be so important. "What ~~else~~ is there?" replies Dunbar.

Like Yossarian, Dunbar knows that life is everything and, like Yossarian, he is plagued by the same doubts and the same conscience. He puts up strong resistance when the group is ordered to bomb a small, undefended village merely for the purpose of creating a road block. He loses the argument, but when the mission is flown he drops his bombs hundreds of yards away from the target, thereby risking a court martial if it were proved that he had done it deliberately. The effect of this on Dunbar is similar to that of the Avignon mission on Yossarian. He becomes increasingly surly and rebellious and it is noted that Dunbar "seldom laughed any more and seemed to be wasting away."¹⁵¹ His career parallels Yossarian's in many other details as well. He is usually to be found in hospital each time Yossarian escapes there; his attitude toward authority and the other men in the squadron is also similar to that of Yossarian. Furthermore, Dunbar, like Yossarian, learns a secret from the Soldier in White much as Yossarian learns the secret which Snowden spilled all over the back of the plane. In chapter thirty-four when the Soldier in White reappears mysteriously in the hospital for a second time, Dunbar

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 324.

peers into the hole over his mouth (the existential void?) and proclaims the grim secret to the rest of the men in the ward: "There is no one inside!... They've stolen him away."¹⁵²

Dunbar has discovered, both figuratively and literally, the truth about the Hollow Men and it is a secret he is not permitted to know. Shortly afterward the hollow cast is removed and Dunbar is "disappeared." His fate is obviously meant as a solemn warning to Yossarian, who at this time is teetering on the brink of total rebellion. It is significant that Dunbar is not from Yossarian's own squadron; there are kindred spirits in other places if Yossarian can only recognize them. That Yossarian recognizes in Dunbar a kindred spirit is made clear by the fact that he bestows on Dunbar an accolade which is the highest praise Yossarian can bestow on any man: "A true prince. One of the finest, least dedicated men in the whole world."¹⁵³

The problem with Dunbar is that he lacks the animal cunning of Orr, the survivalist par excellence. Orr is a direct descendant of Hasek's Good Soldier Schweik. He has one basic rule for survival: oblique innocence.

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 358.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 14.

This, combined with an ability to work absurdity to his own advantage, puts Orr in a category shared by no one else among the victims. When Orr was a child he used to walk around with crab apples in his cheeks except, of course, when he could not get crab apples. Then he used horse chestnuts. His explanation of this behavior is the first clue to his success and not, as critic after critic has suggested, simply Heller's attempt to imitate Abbot and Costello's famous "Who's on First" routine. Orr explains to Yossarian that he also "used to walk around all day with rubber balls in my hands." It is all very confusing to Yossarian and it is not until the end of the novel that he understands the method in Orr's madness. Orr is not to be blamed for Yossarian's lack of understanding. The rational explanation for his behavior is simply that he wanted big, rosy cheeks. But it is the absurdist explanation which is important. Orr explains this to Yossarian carefully but Yossarian fails to see that the logic which Orr uses here is the same logic which he (Yossarian) had used to explain the nightly dreams of Hungry Joe.

Orr sniggered and shook his head. "I did it to protect my good reputation in case anyone ever caught me walking around with crab apples in my cheeks. With rubber balls in my hands I could deny there were crab apples in my cheeks. Every time someone asked me why I was walking around with crab apples in my cheeks, I'd just

open my hands and show them it was rubber balls I was walking around with, not crab apples, and that they were in my hands, not my cheeks. It was a good story. But I never knew if it got across or not, since it's pretty tough to make people understand you when you're talking to them with two crab apples in your cheeks.¹⁵⁴

Yossarian still does not understand, nor does he understand why Orr had once sat by smiling while a big Roman whore beat on his head with her shoe. Orr even converts his stunted stature and gnome-like ugliness into weapons of survival. Whereas Dunbar shouts his amazement at the discovery concerning the Soldier in White, Orr appears to be totally unaware and unmoved by what goes on around him. He even manages to pass off his fantastic mechanical skills as no more than the simple pastimes of a simple mind. The only notable thing about Orr is that he seems to have been shot down on every mission he has flown; he holds the squadron record for demolished planes. No one ever seems to notice that Orr and his crew always manage to escape unharmed. On one such crash the men find that the carbon-dioxide cylinders used to inflate the life jackets have been stolen and replaced, as Sergeant Knight explains, by:

"...those goddam notes from Milo telling us that what was good enough for him was good enough for the rest of us. That bastard! Jesus, did we curse him, all except that buddy of yours Orr,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

who just kept grinning as though for all he cared what was good for Milo might be good enough for the rest of us."¹⁵⁵

The consensus is that Orr is a complete idiot. Orr is so successful at hiding his true character and his intentions that he fools even Yossarian, who fails to catch the import of Orr's invitation to fly with him. Yossarian does not understand that Orr has graduated from crab apples and horse chestnuts to aeroplanes. It is a credit to Orr's insight that he knows it would be useless to explain his behavior to Yossarian outright and attempt to force Yossarian to accept his point of view. He sees the potential in people like Yossarian and Dunbar but knows that they must learn the basic stance on their own. He understands the nature of action in an Absurd world; all he can do is drop hints and save himself. Orr's oblique mask works so well that at one point Yossarian is so concerned about Orr that he wonders:

Who would protect a warmhearted, simple-minded gnome like Orr from rowdies and cliques and from expert athletes like Appleby....Who would shield him against animosity and deceit, against people with ambition and the embittered snobbery of the big shot's wife, against the squalid, corrupting indignities of the profit motive and the friendly neighborhood butcher with inferior meat?¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 302.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 306.

The secret of Orr's success is that he meets catch-22 on its own terms, fights cunning with cunning, absurdity with absurdity, and thereby uncovers the chink in the armor, the Achilles heel of the system. He learns that even catch-22 is governed by its own rules; it, too, has an unwritten loophole. One of the fundamental laws of catch-22 may state that "they have a right to do anything we can't stop them from doing,"¹⁵⁷ but the unwritten loophole states that we have a right to do anything as long as they think we are doing what is expected of us. Orr takes this simple principle and works it into a way of life. Like the Old Man, Orr proves that the first step, survival, is possible.

Apart from Aardvark, whose aggression is absolute because it arises from a blind, unfeeling, wooden indifference, Havermeyer and Captain Black are the crudest among the aggressors. They are simply sadistic and are totally lacking in finesse. Havermeyer thrives on death. He volunteers for every mission and, as if this were not enough, his favorite sport is enticing small field mice into his tent at night with crumbs of food and then blasting them with home-made dum-dum bullets shot from the .45 he had stolen from the dead man in Yossarian's

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 398.

tent. As a result of his dedication to duty--to death--Havermeyer has become a minion of the Pianosa command. He is a willing tool in the grim death game and Colonel Cathcart is fond of remarking that Captain Havermeyer is "the best damned bombardier we've got."¹⁵⁸

While Havermeyer takes part in the death game--and it is a tribute to the logic of absurdity that those who court death so recklessly are the ones who invariably survive--Captain Black enjoys the role of the spectator. His favorite sport is watching the men disintegrate under the nightmarish conditions of mortal fear, which he works incessantly to foster. When the medical tent is ordered closed so that sick call will not disrupt the Bologna mission a second time, Captain Black takes great pleasure in a sign which he has nailed to the door: "CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. DEATH IN THE FAMILY."¹⁵⁹ And when the news finally does come through that the mission will indeed be flown, Black is overjoyed and taunts the men with: "Ha! Ha! Ha! Eat your livers, you bastards. This time you're really in for it."¹⁶⁰ It is Black who taunts Yossarian about the destruction of the Roman whorehouse by American military police. His most famous exploit is the Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade. This has been considered

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 110.

above in another context. However, the attitude of the Pianosa Command toward such insane behavior is worth noting. They are concerned with one thing only: at all costs they must avoid personal embarrassment. This is evident from Colonel Korn's advice to Cathcart on the subject: "The best thing to do now is to send Captain Black a letter of total support and hope he drops dead before he can do too much damage."¹⁶¹

Cathcart follows Korn's advice in this instance as he does on so many other occasions. A consideration of this shows that Korn is one of the most important characters in the novel. In the character of Korn we have another example of Heller's debt to Shakespeare. The parody of Shylock's famous speech by the chaplain has already been noted. In Korn we have a character who belongs to a long line of villains which has Iago as the prototype. Even Korn's position is similar to that of Iago; he is the trusted friend and confidant of Colonel Cathcart, the power behind the throne, as it were. But Korn's kinship with Iago goes beyond this. Korn is a confirmed cynic who maintains his position by pretending to follow when he is, in fact, leading. He is a man of keen intelligence who thrives because he has no illusions about mankind or

¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 114.

himself.

He is not above amusing himself by manipulating men. It is Korn who works out the complicated schedule which forces the chaplain to eat in a different mess hall for each meal. In fact, "he was openly rude and contemptuous to the chaplain once he discovered that the chaplain would let him get away with it."¹⁶² He is quick to capitalize on Major Danby's personal embarrassment during the moaning epidemic which interrupts the Avignon briefing session. When Danby loses control of the briefing Korn steps in and concludes the session "without a single hitch and moved ahead with confidence."¹⁶³ He is unmoved by the fact that his grand performance makes General Dreedle sick to his stomach.

All of this would appear rather petty if it were not for the brutal honesty and uncompromising cynicism which Korn possesses. He sums up his own character for Yossarian just before he presents the "odious" deal:

"You know, Yossarian," he mused affably in a manner of casual reflection that seemed both derisive and sincere, "I really do admire you a bit. You're an intelligent person of great moral character who has taken a very courageous stand. I'm an intelligent person with no

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 220.

moral character at all, so I'm in an ideal position to appreciate it."¹⁶⁴

But Korn is more than cynically honest and intelligent; he is an aggressor who has refined aggression to an art. It is the failure to see this which leads Frederick Karl to state that the aggressors in Catch-22 "are not really evil in any sinister way: rather, they simply react to the given chance, the proffered opportunity....They are men on the make, and such is the quality of modern life all men are waiting for their chance."¹⁶⁵

This may be true of Havermeyer, Black, Aarfy, and even Cathcart, but Korn is evil in the most sinister way because he is aware of his complicity in, and his perpetration of, aggression and absurdity. He thrives on this knowledge as much as on the actions themselves. This is evident from his glib and caustic summary of the life he and Cathcart lead; the purpose of it all, he tells Yossarian, is promotion and power.

Everyone teaches us to aspire to higher things.
A general is higher than a colonel, and a
colonel is higher than a lieutenant colonel.
So we're aspiring.¹⁶⁶

This is an apt summary of life on Pianosa as it applies to

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 413.

¹⁶⁵Contemporary American Novelists, p. 137.

¹⁶⁶Catch-22, p. 415.

the aggressors, but for the majority of those caught up in it it is a matter of blind complicity as Karl suggests. For others--Korn, Milo, and Wintergreen are the obvious examples--it goes beyond complicity and becomes an active, conscious perpetration of absurdity. Iago's comment on the gull, Roderigo, may be used as a summary of their attitude toward the world and the life of man in general: "For I mine own gained knowledge should profane/ If I would time expend with such a snipe/ But for my sport and profit."¹⁶⁷

This attitude is illustrated by a conversation between the chaplain and Colonel Korn concerning the mission to La Spezia, on which Nately and eleven other men were killed. The chaplain attempts to impress upon Korn the terrible nature of the event.

Colonel Korn was silent a moment, regarding the chaplain with a glint of cynical amusement. "Yes, Chaplain, it certainly was terrible," he said finally. "I don't know how we're going to write this one up without making ourselves look bad."

"That isn't what I meant," the chaplain scolded firmly without any fear at all. "Some of those twelve men had already finished their seventy missions."

Colonel Korn laughed. "Would it be any less terrible if they had all been new men?" he inquired caustically.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷Othello, I, iii, 373-75.

¹⁶⁸Catch-22, p. 380.

The chaplain crumbles under Korn's brutal logic. It is worthy of note that Korn's last comment is a cynical twist on the logic which Yossarian uses constantly.

Ritter suggests that "the major forces of the novel are represented by Scheisskopf, Milo Minderbinder, Aarfy, and Yossarian: Military logic, Capitalism, Indifference, and the Life Force, in that order."¹⁶⁹ This is accurate, as far as it goes, but it is an oversimplification. It is significant that he does not mention Korn; in fact the importance of Korn has been overlooked by practically every critic of the novel. Korn does not belong under any of the categories suggested by Ritter; his cynical intelligence is not subsumed by any of these forces, it is complementary to them. Korn's cynical intelligence even complements the intelligence of Yossarian, although it is as much antithetical as complementary. To ignore or underestimate the role of Korn among the aggressors would be the same as ignoring or underestimating the role of Orr among the victims. Heller illustrates the importance of these characters in a way which, at first, appears to understate their role; neither Orr nor Korn are given separate chapters, as many less significant characters are. Their presence, however, is continually felt.

Korn presents an extreme counter balance to the innocence and naivete of people like Nately and the

¹⁶⁹ Fearful Comedy (1968), p. 35.

chaplain. But Korn is more than this, he is a theorist of catch-22. It is the combination of Korn's sinister, sadistic, cynical intelligence and the blind, and often pathetically stupid, thirst for power on the part of men like Cathcart, Scheisskopf, and Peckem which creates on Pianosa a haven for the forces represented by catch-22. What they accomplish on Pianosa, Milo Minderbinder and, to a lesser degree, ex-PFC Wintergreen are capable of accomplishing on a global scale.

v. Eros versus Thanatos.

Minderbinder (the name is obvious once the second syllable is removed) is the paragon of aggression. The efforts of Cathcart, Scheisskopf, Wintergreen, Aarfy, and even Korn pale when compared to those of Milo. Milo is so far beyond these that any attempt to speak of him in human terms is bound to be inadequate; he is the image of the ruler (ruler as entrepreneur) in the post-human era. What makes Milo unique among men is his ability to think and operate in terms of what Kahler describes as "totalization."¹⁷⁰ We are told that Milo "could see more things than most people, but could see none of them too distinctly."¹⁷¹ Because he operates in this manner, the

¹⁷⁰ See The Tower and the Abyss (1957), pp. 49-82.

¹⁷¹ Catch-22, p. 64.

individual human being does not exist for Milo; he thinks only in terms of the Syndicate. Such a total view produces in Milo's victims, at one and the same time, a sense of awe and a sense of terror. This terror produces in turn a sense of dehumanization.

Terror accomplishes its work of dehumanization through the total integration of the population into collectivities, then depriving them of the psychological means of direct communication in spite of--or rather because of--the tremendous communications apparatus to which they are exposed. The individual...is never alone and always alone. He becomes numb and rigid not only in relation to his neighbor but also in relation to himself; fear robs him of the power of spontaneous emotional or mental reaction. Thinking becomes a stupid crime; it endangers his life.¹⁷²

This comment by a noted psychologist on the contemporary condition could be read as a direct comment on life on Pianosa and the world envisaged by Milo--for "collectivities" read M & M Enterprises. Milo is the capitalist par excellence, but the Capitalism he proclaims is absolute so that the only value left is the value which a thing (and in Milo's world people are things) possesses as a commodity. Once the world and human affairs are redefined in terms of commodities, homo sapiens gives place to homo economicus.¹⁷³ But Milo's ultimate

¹⁷² Leo Lowenthal, "Terror's Atomization of Man," Commentary (January, 1946), p. 2.

¹⁷³ See Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death: the Psychoanalytical Meaning of History (1959), pp. 235ff.

significance goes beyond this for, as Norman Brown points out, Capitalism is a sublimation of the death wish. It converts the world into matter (filthy lucre, feces) and forces a denial of Eros. "This withdrawal of Eros hands over culture to the death instinct; and the inhuman, abstract, impersonal world which the death instinct creates progressively eliminates all possibility of the life of sublimated Eros, which we nostalgically so admire in the ancient Greeks."¹⁷⁴ It is the same Life Force that drives Yossarian to resist Milo's world; this resistance is symbolized by his refusal to help Milo peddle his chocolate-covered cotton.

Milo lacks the intelligence of Korn, but this is not the point. Intelligence, even the cynical intelligence of Korn, is a human trait and such considerations are outside Milo's ken. Milo, when he is first described, appears to possess ordinary human qualities such as compassion and grief, but we learn as the novel progresses that in Milo such feelings have meaning only in relation to things. This is best illustrated at Snowden's funeral. When Snowden is lowered into the grave, Milo bursts into tears.

"I can't watch it," he cried, turning away in anguish. "I just can't sit here and watch while those mess halls let my syndicate die."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 303.

¹⁷⁵ Catch-22, pp. 258-59.

The threefold meaning given to death in this scene summarizes the way death is treated throughout the novel. Only one meaning is significant to Milo. In Snowden we have the death of a human being which is the focus for most of the action in the novel. In Milo's reaction to this event--as opposed to Yossarian's--we are given a symbol of the death of humanness; Milo is incapable of reacting to Snowden's death in a human way. Both are given a wider significance when considered in terms of the only "death" which Milo understands--the economic death of the non-human, bloodless organism, the Syndicate.

Paradoxically, the mind-boggling intricacies of Milo's empire reduce life to a childishly simple level. There is only one principle, one golden rule: economic feasibility. This is reflected in the simple principles of Milo's moral code: "One of these moral principles was that it was never a sin to charge as much as the traffic would bear."¹⁷⁶ Business is absolute; all other considerations are secondary. Proof of this is seen in the simple, unassuming sign which appears on all of Milo's planes. The significance of the sign lies not in what it says but in what it conceals.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 63.

Milo Minderbinder's planes flew in from everywhere....The planes were decorated with flamboyant squadron emblems illustrating such laudable ideals as Courage, Might, Justice, Truth, Liberty, Love, Honor, and Patriotism that were painted out at once by Milo's mechanics with a double coat of flat white and replaced in garish purple with the stenciled name M & M ENTERPRISES, FINE FRUITS AND PRODUCE. The "M & M" IN "M & M ENTERPRISES" stood for Milo and Minderbinder, and the & was inserted, Milo revealed candidly, to nullify any impression that the syndicate was a one-man operation.¹⁷⁷

This last point is of cardinal importance because another of Milo's inviolable moral principles, which he repeats throughout the novel, is that everybody has a share. And Milo "proved good as his word when a rawboned major from Minnesota curled his lip in rebellious disavowal and demanded his share of the syndicate Milo kept saying everybody owned. Milo met the challenge by writing the words "A Share" on the nearest scrap of paper and handing it away with a virtuous disdain that won the envy and admiration of almost everyone who knew him."¹⁷⁸ Around these two simple principles Milo builds a cartel the like of which even Colonel Cathcart could not imagine.

While it may not be human for Milo to attain such power and absolute control, it is perfectly logical that he should. It is just as logical as Hungry Joe's nightmares or Orr's use of crab apples. Whenever Milo encounters

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 284.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 362.

any resistance there is always one sure method of quelling the opposition. There is one sacred law on Milo's side against which no one seems disposed to argue. Whenever his methods are challenged, Milo stands his ground with all the wrath and indignation of the just man and gallantly invokes "the law of supply and demand."¹⁷⁹ In his entire career Milo overlooks this law only once and then it is simply a question of bad timing. His cornering of the Egyptian cotton market proves, in the long run, to be the incident which provides Milo with the impetus for his greatest exploits.

In order to turn this error into a profit Milo has to exercise his daring to the limit. Eventually he contracts with the enemy (they are not enemies as far as Milo is concerned since the only enemy he recognized is the man or country who does not pay bills on time) to attack and defend the bridge at Orvieto, and then to bomb his own squadron. For a while it appears that Milo has gone too far; a chorus of protest arises from every quarter. "Decent people everywhere were affronted, and Milo was all washed up until he opened his books to the public and disclosed the tremendous profit he had made."¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., p. 254.

There can be no argument against the profit motive and Milo is exonerated. By the end of the novel Milo is in complete control of everything and has joined forces with Wintergreen, Cathcart and Scheisskopf.

It has been suggested that Heller should have used Milo to give Catch-22 a direction and a purpose but that he fails to do so because Milo "is far too outlandish" and overdrawn to contribute to any sort of social satire."¹⁸¹ Such a comment could have meaning only if one is prepared to ignore Milo's role within the context of the novel. Seen within the framework of the world described in Catch-22 the extremes of Milo's career are not only logical (according to the logic of catch-22) but totally consistent with the world he inhabits. It has been shown that the main concern of Catch-22 is to describe a world in which man exists as an alien, dehumanized being. Such a world attempts to redefine man and, as Brown suggests, this new definition creates a radically new category.

The effect is to substitute an abstraction, Homo Economicus, for the concrete totality of human nature, and thus to dehumanize human nature. In this dehumanized human nature man loses contact with his own body, more specifically with his senses, with sensuality and with the pleasure-principle. And this dehumanized human nature produces an inhuman consciousness, whose

¹⁸¹Waldmeir, "Two-Novelists of the Absurd: Heller and Kesey," p. 195.

only currency is abstractions divorced from real life--the industrious, coolly rational, economic, prosaic mind. Capitalism has made us so stupid and one-sided that objects exist for us only if we can possess them or if they have utility.¹⁸²

Milo Minderbinder, mistaken by Waldmeir for an outlandish caricature, is the mythic embodiment of this post-human mutation and the crystallization of a commitment to death made by the race when the first coin was minted, a commitment from which sane men like Yossarian have been attempting to extricate themselves ever since.

If Milo is the image of the ruler (ruler as entrepreneur) in the Absurd, post-human era envisaged by Heller, Captain Aarfy Aardvaark is the image of its ordinary citizen. Even his name, Aardvaark ("earth-pig"), suggests his character and the gulf which separates him from the image of man. Aardvaark is a hulk without feelings, emotions, or intelligence; he is personified indifference, the perfect image of man as object. He is an affable, pudgy, athletic fraternity man who smiles continually and who measures his life by the number of financial "contacts" he can make. He scoffs at Nately's suggestion that he intends to marry his whore. "Why you're not even old enough to know what true love is," he tells the young lieutenant. "Aarfy was an authority on the subject of true

¹⁸²Life Against Death (1959), p. 238.

love because he had already fallen truly in love with Nately's father and with the prospect of working for him after the war in some executive capacity as a reward for befriending Nately."¹⁸³

The most significant comment on Aarfy and his role in this "brave new world" is his treatment after he rapes and murders the homely servant girl in Rome. The fact is that nothing happens to him at all for murder in this context is meaningless except when it has economic consequences. Aarfy sums up the situation correctly when he says: "They aren't going to put good old Aarfy in jail. Not for killing her."¹⁸⁴ She, after all, is but a simple, unimportant human being. Aarfy has learned Milo's moral code well. But Aarfy has another significance in the novel; he is the physical embodiment of the indifferent, claustrophobic cosmos against which Yossarian struggles to survive. Aardvark represents the hopelessness Yossarian feels each time he finds himself face to face with the inexorable law of catch-22. Aardvark is the keeper of the keys in a universe labeled huis clos.

This is metaphorically demonstrated in the descriptions of the two occasions on which Yossarian's

¹⁸³ Catch-22, p. 283.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 408.

plane is hit by flak. Yossarian's duty as bombardier forces him to sit in the most vulnerable part of the aeroplane, the delicate glass nose cone. From this position the bombardier can see the target and thus direct the bomb attack; it is also his duty to recommend evasive action whenever ground fire is encountered. The bombardier is, in fact, the captain of the plane. Because of the size of this compartment, Yossarian is forced to leave his parachute pack behind him in the main body of the plane. Suspended in mid air with no protection and little hope of survival should the plane crash, Yossarian lives in mortal fear while the plane is over the target area. Aardvark is the navigator in Yossarian's plane, and he discharges the duties of that office with complete incompetence. On both occasions when the plane is hit by flak Yossarian scrambles frantically to reach his parachute only to find his passage blocked by the affable, indifferent Aarfy.

The first mission to Bologna is, actually flown twice; the first day proves to be a milk run, on the second day the bombers encounter a solid wall of flak. Yossarian drops his bombs, shouts evasive instructions to McWatt, the pilot, and turns to leave the nose cone at the very instant that the plane is hit. Yossarian is panic-stricken;

his only thought is to get his parachute. But Aarfy has other ideas, he has come forward to get a better view. Yossarian is trapped. He screams at Aarfy, begs him, punches him, and pleads with him. Aarfy smiles affably and keeps telling Yossarian to speak up because he cannot hear what he is saying.

"I still couldn't hear you," Aarfy said.
 "I said get out of here!" Yossarian shouted, and broke into tears. He began punching Aarfy in the body with both hands as hard as he could. "Get away from me! Get away!"

Punching Aarfy was like sinking his fists into a limp sack of inflated rubber. There was no resistance, no response at all from the soft, insensitive mass, and after a while Yossarian's spirit died and his arms dropped helplessly with exhaustion. He was overcome with a humiliating feeling of impotence and was ready to weep in self-pity.¹⁸⁵

Aarfy continually gets lost as a result of his incompetence as a navigator. It is Aarfy's stupidity that causes the death of Kraft at Ferrara and the same stupidity causes him to lead the planes over the city of Leghorn on another occasion when the mission should have been a milk run. On this occasion there is no time to take evasive action. Yossarian is wounded in the thigh and turns to Aarfy for help. Even now he encounters the same indifference.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 147-48.

"I lost my balls! Aarfy, I lost my balls!" Aarfy didn't hear, and Yossarian bent forward and tugged at his arm. "Aarfy, help me," he pleaded, almost weeping. "I'm hit! I'm hit!" Aarfy turned slowly with a bland, quizzical grin. "What?"

"I'm hit, Aarfy! Help me!" Aarfy grinned again and shrugged amiably. "I can't hear you," he said. "Can't you see me?" Yossarian cried incredulously, and he pointed to the deepening pool of blood he felt splashing down all around him and spreading out underneath. "I'm wounded! Help me, for God's sake! Aarfy, help me!" "I still can't hear you," Aarfy complained tolerantly....¹⁸⁶

These scenes not only point to the continual state of terror in which Yossarian exists but they also demonstrate, through Aarfy, the forces against which Yossarian is fighting as well as the nature of the conflict. The indifference of Aarfy is illustrative of the indifference which the world has toward Yossarian's existence. The presence of Aarfy at the times when Yossarian is most immediately exposed to the horror and insanity of war gives him a significance beyond the personal; he is the concrete manifestation of the total Absurdity which confronts Yossarian at every turn. Aarfy is the embodiment of the truth of Snowden's message which Yossarian learns before the novel opens but only understands much later. "The spirit gone, man is garbage. That was

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 284.

Snowden's secret."¹⁸⁷ In Milo and Aarfy Heller gives us two prime specimens from the heap.

Against the garbage and the death wish and against catch-22, with all its "spinning reasonableness," Yossarian opposes life: frail, naked, vital life. Such a stance is not reasonable when reasonable is considered in terms of the definition the word has within the context of the novel. "Yossarian is a Nietzschean and Blakean man who opposes absurdity and meaninglessness not with a rational system but with life itself, erotic life filled with experience."¹⁸⁸ All his arguments, his robust sexuality, and his consciousness of danger and suffering are the result of his absolute, non-compromising belief in the value of his life. This is illustrated early in the novel by his arguments with Clevinger, the rationalist, and by his acceptance of his rôle as a misfit.

Yossarian has decided long ago that sanity and rationality, as the world defines them, are in effect the height of madness because they lead only to death. He wants no share in such lunacy and makes a determined effort to place himself outside its sphere. At one point he reflects: "Cleavinger was dead. That was the basic flaw

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 430.

¹⁸⁸ Ritter, pp. 38-39.

in his philosophy."¹⁸⁹ It is in this context that Yossarian's logic, which at first appears to be entirely negative, assumes a positive quality. A logic based on a commitment to life appears totally out of key when balanced against a logic which, like Clevinger's, leads only to death. Mere participation in such insanity is aggression; by refusing to participate willingly Yossarian places himself squarely on the side of the victims. When, on three separate occasions, which will be discussed shortly, Yossarian loses sight of this fact he comes precariously close to losing himself as well.

The only activity at which Yossarian demonstrates any proficiency is, ironically, bombing. But his skill as a bombardier results from his great cowardice and sense of terror rather than from any actual attempt on his part to discharge his duty well. At practically every other "normal" activity Yossarian is totally inept. He refuses to "pitch in" whenever possible and when he is forced to participate his only consolation is his lack of ability. "Yossarian owed his good health to exercise, fresh air, teamwork and good sportsmanship; it was to get away from them all that he had first discovered the hospital."¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹Catch-22, p. 103.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., p. 175.

He never hits anything when he shoots skeet and never wins at poker. "These were two disappointments to which he had resigned himself: he would never be a skeet shooter, and he would never make money."¹⁹¹

This last admission is one which serves to place Yossarian forever outside the pale in a world totally committed to economic value. It makes him a madman for, as Norman Brown points out, "the connection between money thinking and rational thinking is so deeply ingrained in our practical lives that it seems impossible to question it."¹⁹² Yossarian is a lunatic for the simple reason that he places his life above economic commodity. He realizes this only too well, but with this realization comes another which is even more frightening; he realizes that the forces around him are committed to death and that he, because he insists on the opposite view, is guilty of being alive. He is the image of the Orwellian "thought criminal." In a scene where Yossarian attempts to explain this to Clevinger we are given at once an idea of his terror and his mythic significance.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 35-36.

¹⁹² Life Against Death (1959), p. 234.

As far back as Yossarian could recall, he explained to Clevinger with a patient smile, somebody was always hatching a plot to kill him. There were people who cared for him and people who didn't and those who didn't hated him and were out to get him. They hated him because he was Assyrian. But they couldn't touch him, he told Clevinger, because he had a sound mind in a pure body and was strong as an ox. They couldn't touch him because he was Tarzan, Mandrake, Flash Gordon. He was Bill Shakespeare. He was Cain, Ulysses, the Flying Dutchman; he was Lot in Sodom, Deirdre of the Sorrows, Sweeney in the nightingales among the trees. He was miracle ingredient Z-247. He was--

"Crazy!" Clevinger interrupted shrieking.

"That's what you are! Crazy!"

"--immense. I'm a real, slam-bang, honest-to-goodness, three fisted humdinger. I'm a bona fide supraman."

"Superman?" Clevinger cried. "Superman?"

"Supraman," Yossarian corrected.¹⁹³

It is because he understands the nature of his position so well that Yossarian sees the war as only one more threat to his existence--albeit an extreme one. There are countless other threats as well. Death is a state of mind shared by everyone who refuses to grant the same importance to his life as he does himself. There are no neutrals. "There were bartenders, bricklayers and bus conductors all over the world who wanted him dead, landlords and tenants, traitors and patriots, lynchers, leeches and lackeys, and they were all out to bump him off."¹⁹⁴ Furthermore there are innumerable diseases and

¹⁹³Catch-22, pp. 19-20.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., p. 170.

countless grotesque natural accidents which he must fear and Yossarian lists them all in a litany comparable to Jacques Prevert's "Song of the Blood," until he begins to doubt even the "billions of conscientious body cells oxidating away day and night like dumb animals at their complicated job of keeping him alive and healthy, and every one was a potential traitor and foe."¹⁹⁵

It is the attitude which seems to accept all of this as normal which infuriates Yossarian; if such a mentality is rational, he wants no part of it. This is the significance of his early identification with Tarzan and the others; to defy death he must defy rationality. It is this stance which starts him on the road toward becoming the rebel as defined by Camus. He says "no" to death. "What is left is the only true thing remaining for all men--sex: healthy, robust, joyful sex."¹⁹⁶ Heller is careful not to equate this with love. In this world love is easily converted into a lifeless commodity. When love is treated it is in the form of a merciless parody--the relationship between Natelly and his whore. Pure, simple, non-committed sex is a very different matter. In this there is life as illustrated by the picture of the

¹⁹⁵Ibid., p. 171.

¹⁹⁶Karl, "Joseph Heller's Catch-22: Only Fools Walk in Darkness," p. 140.

Old Man in Rome whose throne is surrounded by lush young whores--the image of a grotesque Pan or Silenus.

Yossarian's physical stature and size are continually mentioned throughout the novel. Even Nurse Duckett comments on his "wide, long, sinewy back with its bronzed, unblemished skin."¹⁹⁷ Against the profit motive and the death wish he proclaims the value of full lips, breasts, nipples, well-rounded buttocks, and silken flanks. His all-embracing sexuality makes no distinctions and accepts no limitations. Even while he is enjoying one woman he is plagued by the thought of the many others he will never have the opportunity to enjoy. He assures Scheisskopf's wife that he is glad he has her, but he is quick to add:

"...I'm also goddam good and miserable that I can't have Dori Duz again, too. Or the hundreds of other girls and women I'll see and want in my short lifetime and won't be able to go to bed with even once."¹⁹⁸

The affair which best illustrates this boundless sexuality is the one Yossarian has with General Dreedle's vivacious young nurse. It is unique because he never speaks to, or touches, the girl. She is always to be found in General Dreedle's company and is therefore present

¹⁹⁷Catch-22, p. 330.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., p. 177.

with him at the Avignon briefing session. When Yossarian unleashes his desire it creates a commotion which throws the entire briefing into chaos. The moment Yossarian saw the girl he was overcome.

...he moaned in deep despair suddenly at the thought that he might never see again this lovely woman to whom he had never spoken a word and whom he now loved so pathetically.... his senses were stuffed to congestion with the yellow radiance of her hair and the unfelt pressure of her soft, short fingers, with the rounded, untasted wealth of her nubile breasts in her Army-pink shirt...and with the rolling, ripened, triangular confluences of her belly and thighs in her light, silk forest-green gabardine officer's pants. He drank her in insatiably from head to painted toenail. He never wanted to lose her. "Ooooooooooooooh," he moaned again....¹⁹⁹

That he is unable to transform this sexuality into a commitment is illustrated by his brief encounter with Luciana. Luciana knows the conditions under which they are condemned to live and, even while she is writing her address on a slip of paper, she is quick to add:

"You'll tear it up into little pieces the minute I'm gone and go walking away like a big shot because a tall, young, beautiful girl like me, Luciana, let you sleep with her and did not ask you for money."²⁰⁰

When Yossarian asks how much money she wants, Luciana knows that she is right. She understands the profit motive and the nature of commitment in an Absurd world

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 216-17.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 161.

better than Yossarian does at this point. As soon as she is gone Yossarian, feeling very much like a big shot, tears up the slip of paper. He has not yet discovered the very fine line which separates positive commitment from active participation in aggression in an Absurd cosmos ruled by catch-22.

I have dealt with this concept in some detail at the end of Chapter II in relation to Yossarian's supposed justification of the war. It is necessary to return to it again here in order to explore the nature of Yossarian's revolt and relate his character and his actions throughout the novel to his final decision. Most commentators on the novel insist that Yossarian's stance is totally negative; a few point out that when his rebellion does take a positive turn it is couched in the form of a slipshod deus ex machina ending that is both artistically unconvincing and totally inconsistent with his behavior up to that point. Both views fail to come to terms with the nature of action in an Absurd world and with Yossarian's movement back and forth between hope and despair throughout the novel, a movement symbolized by the nickname Yo-Yo, a name he despises.

It is true that for the most part Yossarian's actions take the form of passive resistance. He malingers in the hospital, wears two flak suits, refuses

to participate whenever possible, and generally plays the role of the traditional coward. But he also attempts several more overt actions in order to try and protect his "balls-centered" life. It is when he finally understands the nature of such actions, both passive and active, positive and negative, that he makes his final decision.

One of the most overt acts of insubordination which he attempts, his nakedness, takes place in the "past" time of the novel. Then, as the action of the novel progresses, he sabotages his own plane, creates an epidemic of diarrhea in the squadron by persuading Corporal Snark to put laundry soap in the food, and secretly moves the bomb line on the combat map. Each of these actions brings him one step closer to a direct confrontation with those in authority and with the ultimate forces of catch-22. In fact, catch-22 begins to close in on him, as it were, so that the very actions which he undertakes to protect his life begin to become threats to his existence. This is the ultimate manifestation of absurd logic. Eventually he is forced into a position where any action which he attempts, either passive or active, leads him toward a denial of the code by which he has managed to live so far. He is an Absurd Adam before, during, and after the fall.

Proof of Yossarian's claim to suprahuman, mythic importance is to be found in the fact that he is continually approached throughout the novel by men who would seek his moral sanction, who wish to tempt him, or who see in him an image of their own sublimated desires for freedom and individuality. A consideration of this allows us to follow Yossarian through the various stages of his revolt and illustrates his own psychological progression as he moves toward a fuller understanding of the legacy of Snowden and Orr, and toward an understanding of the ramifications of his own stance. Such a consideration proves that not only is his final decision apt and consistent with the logic by which he has lived all along, but also that it is totally necessary and inescapable. Three items are worthy of consideration in this context:

Yossarian's involvement with Dobbs in the plan to murder Colonel Cathcart, Yossarian's relationship with Milo, and the reaction which Yossarian's final refusal to fly more missions causes among the men of the squadron.

Dobbs has become "a shattered wreck of a virile young man" because he knows he is no longer fit to fly a plane but he can not convince his superiors of this simple fact. Thus, on the day the missions are raised to sixty, he approaches Yossarian and reveals his plan to

murder Cathcart. All Dobbs wants is Yossarian's approval, but Yossarian refuses to give it. "He's got a right to live, too, I guess," Yossarian says of Cathcart. Dobbs insists that this is the same logic which Yossarian once found so infuriating in Clevinger. Dobbs goes on to point out that Cathcart refuses to take their lives seriously and thereby forfeits his own right to life. Yossarian still refuses. Later, when Yossarian is in hospital with his thigh wound, Dobbs comes to him again. But now Yossarian is hopeful again. "I've got a million-dollar leg wound here," he tells Dobbs. Another point in his favor is the fact that he has been judged insane by the group psychiatrist, Major Sanderson. He is sure they are not going to send a madman out to be killed. But, as Doc Daneeka points out, "Who else would go?"

Doc Daneeka is proven correct and Yossarian is sent back into combat. He flies two more missions and then the rumor of another Bologna mission begins to circulate. He limps into Dobbs's tent and announces: "Let's kill Colonel Cathcart. We'll do it together." But by now Dobbs has completed his sixty missions and is not willing to take any unnecessary chances. Yossarian reminds him that Cathcart is bound to raise the missions again. The same argument which took place earlier when Dobbs approached Yossarian the first time is repeated

again with Dobbs and Yossarian switching sides in the debate. But why the sudden change of heart on Yossarian's part? The answer to this question becomes clear when we consider the relationship between Milo and Yossarian.

This is a strange relationship because they are perhaps the two most diametrically opposed characters in the novel. Very early in his career Milo invites Yossarian to form a partnership with him and confides many of the secrets of his syndicate to him, "reasoning shrewdly that anyone who would not steal from the country he loved would not steal from anybody."²⁰¹ Yossarian, Orr and Nately usually accompany Milo on his mad buying and selling spree all over Europe and the East. The reason for this is obvious; they are too naive (economically), too human, to be concerned with the gigantic intricacies of Milo's operations. Nevertheless, Yossarian experiences a certain sense of awe concerning Milo, but it is a mixed feeling. "Everybody but Yossarian thought Milo was a jerk, first for volunteering for the job of mess officer and next for taking it so seriously. Yossarian also thought that Milo was a jerk; but he also knew that Milo was a genius."²⁰²

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 62.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 248.

As Milo's escapades become more and more daring Yossarian's sense of awe steadily turns toward a sense of revulsion. He can not excuse Milo for his role in the death of Mudd (at Orvieto) or for the bombing of the squadron. The fact that Milo made a great profit on each deal is not satisfaction enough for Yossarian but he finds this explanation difficult to refute because the profit motive is satisfaction enough for everyone else. Milo's steadily increasing power and Yossarian's growing disillusionment are brought into full confrontation in the scene which describes Snowden's funeral in detail. All the events here described have taken place in the "past" time of the novel but they are brought together now (Chapter XXIV) and retold in order to determine their relational thematic significance. The Life Force, the death wish, and the cash-nexus converge in this scene and the scene becomes a pivotal point in Yossarian's development. James Mellard points out that "it is the scene in which Yossarian rejects Milo that becomes the center of gravity of the novel, for in that scene occur the keys to Heller's method, the pivotal point in Yossarian's development, and the images of death and birth that give the narrative its shape and significance."²⁰³

²⁰³Bucknell Review (May, 1968), p. 39.

The mythic significance of this scene is obvious. I have mentioned above Yossarian's comments about the tree in which he is sitting being "the tree of life" and the tree "of knowledge of good and evil." When we consider Yossarian's primal nakedness and Milo's snake-like movements and olive drab clothing, it is easily seen that this is meant as an Edenic temptation scene. Furthermore, the same events are retold by the chaplain and his retelling gives both another perspective and a confirmation of purpose to the scene. The chaplain does not identify Yossarian as the naked man in the tree. In fact, he does not come to terms with the possible reality of the scene at all. But, in his deliberations on the concept of déjà vu, he recalls not only the naked man but "a second man clad in a brown mustache and sinister dark garments from head to toe who bent forward ritualistically along the limb to offer the first man something to drink from a brown goblet."²⁰⁴ In fact it is the chocolate-covered cotton which Milo has offered Yossarian. Yossarian's rejection of this is symbolic of his rejection of Milo's world. This is further substantiated by the fact that Yossarian sneeringly suggests to Milo that he bribe the government as a method of unloading his cotton.

²⁰⁴Catch-22, p. 267.

The key to this rejection is the particular deaths of Mudd and Snowden. Milo babbles on about his syndicate all the time that the funeral progresses below them. In the middle of Milo's monologue Yossarian asks a question which echoes his question about Snowden at the educational session. "Did the dead man in my tent have a share?" he demands. Milo assures Yossarian that Mudd did indeed have a share. But the strange anonymity surrounding Mudd and his death convinces Yossarian that in Milo's world the individual does not count, does not exist. The same principle applied in Milo's favor excuses him from all blame. But Yossarian will not be put off so easily. He recalls Milo's implication in Snowden's death as well; when Yossarian attempted to find the morphine to ease the young gunner's pain he had found only Milo's famous note. Yossarian realizes at this point that death is always the same whether it involves one or many. "To Yossarian, Milo's crimes against humanity, like those of governments, armies, and corporations, are really too huge for comprehension, but his crime against one individual....is enough to particularize Yossarian's disillusionment."²⁰⁵ Yossarian balances the individual human life against the profit motive

²⁰⁵Mellard, p. 39.

and opts for the former.

The key concept here is that of particularization. Yossarian's actions and yo-yo-like movements through the novel can best be understood in terms of the degree to which he remains aware of, or loses sight of, this concept and the degree to which he attempts to apply the concept in a positive (hope) or negative (despair) manner. Yossarian redefines Milo's gigantic operation solely in terms of the particular human life and by a positive application of this principle he is able to reject Milo and all that he represents. But on three separate occasions he mistakenly attempts to apply the principle in a negative way which leads him toward a loss of his mythic innocence (the Eden myth again) and toward a loss of hope.

This loss of hope is illustrated in the burial scene by the comments of Milo and Yossarian at the end of the funeral. Milo is still babbling on about his syndicate but his comments have a direct thematic significance in terms of Yossarian's psychological development.

"It's all over," observed Yossarian.

"It's the end," Milo agreed despondently.

"There's no hope left."²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶Catch-22, p. 259.

This is echoed by an almost identical "no hope" conversation between Yossarian and Major Danby at the end of the novel just before Yossarian learns of Orr's escape to Sweden.

It is because Yossarian has not understood the legacy of Orr--the nature of action in an Absurd world--that he applies the concept of particularization in a negative way. This is why he changes his mind about the murder of Colonel Cathcart. Throughout the novel Yossarian has been opposing his life against metaphysical absolutes. He has managed to retain a sense of the value of life even in terms of the individual aggressor as is evidenced by his remark that even Cathcart has a right to life. This has made him ineffectual, in a particular sense, in accomplishing any significant change in his environment but it has kept him sane and kept him from becoming an aggressor himself. He is guilty of aggression to the degree to which he is guilty of participation in the war, guilty because he has not attempted not to participate. This, of course, is the crux of the problem posed by catch-22, for an open refusal to participate would endanger his life, too. This is the alternative which he must explore before he makes his final decision.

The plan to kill Colonel Cathcart does not materialize but he continues for some time on this course.

toward a total denial of his own code for survival. I have already discussed at some length the final onslaught on absurdity which takes place in the latter chapters of the novel. McWatt and Kid Sampson are killed. Milo betrays the entire squadron into flying his missions and Nately is killed as a result. The chaplain is arrested and, in what is symbolic of the total triumph of absurdity, Scheisskopf--now General Scheisskopf--becomes the supreme commander. These events drive Yossarian close to the breaking point.

Yossarian marched backward with his gun on his hip and refused to fly any more missions. He marched backward because he was continually spinning around as he walked to make certain no one was sneaking up on him from behind. Every sound to his rear was a warning, every person he passed a potential assassin. He kept his hand on his gun butt constantly and smiled at no one but Hungry Joe. He told Captain Pilchard and Captain Wren that he was through flying.²⁰⁷

The mention of Hungry Joe in this context is no accident. For the rest of the novel Yossarian, like Hungry Joe, treads the narrow line between sanity and madness.

It is essential that his decision to kill Colonel Cathcart, the wearing of the gun, and his initial acceptance of the "odious" deal be seen as extensions of the same frame of mind and that this frame of mind be seen for what

²⁰⁷Ibid., p. 384.

it actually is: a frame of mind which is inconsistent with the code Yossarian professes throughout the novel and to which he returns at the end. Throughout the novel madness is identified with a mentality which accepts death. Yossarian has attempted to remain sane by rejecting this. On these three occasions (a threefold temptation?), when all hope appears to be lost, he comes precariously close to accepting it. It is not that Yossarian willingly does so, he is legitimately attempting to make a stand, to strike a blow against absurdity. But he will learn that in an Absurd world such action is not possible unless one is willing to become an aggressor.

Proof of this can be seen in the fact that for a time now Yossarian becomes the conventional hero. The men in the squadron, even those who considered him crazy all along, appear out of the shadows at night to offer him secret encouragement. Finally, when Havermeyer asks if there is anything he can do to help, Yossarian answers: "Put a gun on and start marching with me."²⁰⁸ With this statement Yossarian places himself squarely on the side of the aggressors. This is a perversion of his own logic and breaks faith with the supramen with whom he had earlier identified himself. It is a perversion of his

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 393.

own logic because implied in the statement is an acceptance of death as an alternative. This is an admission which Yossarian has continually refused to make. His attitude changes accordingly. No longer does he proclaim that everybody is trying to kill him. Now he sees each person as trying to kill him, and against each person he prepares to take action. But, by taking unto himself the power over the life of another person, Yossarian gives everybody (and each one) the same right over his own. This is catch-22 and on these three occasions Yossarian is in perfect harmony with it and the environment it fosters.

Those critics who reject the present ending of Catch-22 would apparently prefer an ending which would conclude the novel on this note, with Yossarian ready to go down fighting; ready to accept Natelly's philosophy that "it's better to die on one's feet than live on one's knees," rather than the philosophy proclaimed by the Old Man that "it is better to live on one's feet than die on one's knees." Such an ending would certainly be inconsistent because it would accept catch-22.

Yossarian's final refusal to fly causes considerable embarrassment to those of the Pianosa Command. Colonel Korn decides that there are several possible ways of handling the situation. "Let's begin with the kindest. Send him to Rome for a rest for a few days," he advises Cathcart.

In Rome Yossarian breaks the news of Nately's death to his whore, and she becomes an avenging angel who stalks Yossarian for the rest of the novel. Even though Yossarian is not responsible, directly at least, for Nately's death he understands the logic of Nately's Whore's attack on his life. She simply applies the principle of particularization which he has accepted himself. "Maybe it's because I broke his nose, or maybe it's because I was the only one in sight she could hate when she got the news,"²⁰⁹ he tells Hungry Joe. Back in the squadron he continues to wear the gun. Finally, Captain Black, who has begun calling Yossarian "Old Blood and Guts," comes and taunts him with the news that the whorehouse has been cleared and the girls driven into the streets. "The M.P.s busted the whole apartment up and drove the whores right out," Black tells him cheerfully.

When he goes to Rome now it is without official leave and with a determined mind to "try to break the lousy chain of inherited habit that was imperiling them all." Specifically, he intends to save the Kid Sister of Nately's Whore. He is now attempting to apply the concept of particularization in a more positive way; he will save one particular victim. But, as I have shown at the end of

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 389.

Chapter II, he proves himself unequal to the task and fails not only in his bid to save the child but also fails to help even a struggling old woman when the opportunity presents itself in the streets of Rome. He finds himself unable to act because it becomes clear to him that any attempt to intervene in this Absurd world will surely accomplish little or nothing and most probably lead to his death.

A simple sign on a restaurant: "TONY'S RESTAURANT. FINE FOOD AND DRINK. KEEP OUT,"²¹⁰ should have convinced him of his status in this Absurd world but he fails to understand its import and plunges into a surrealist night journey through the streets of bombed Rome where every action is perverted into an image of futility.

"The night was filled with horrors, and he thought he knew how Christ must have felt as he walked through the world, like a psychiatrist through a ward full of nuts, like a victim through a prison full of thieves."²¹¹ Yossarian realizes that, like Christ, he will end up dead if he tries to change the situation in which he finds himself. The only image left for him is that of "some girl he could love who would soothe and excite him and put him to sleep."²¹²

²¹⁰Ibid., p. 402.

²¹¹Ibid., p. 405.

²¹²Ibid., p. 407.

In an effort to sustain this image he rushes off to look for Michaela, the simple, homely servant girl, only to find that Aarfy has raped and murdered her.

He has attempted to make a positive commitment and found that in an Absurd world such a commitment is futile and dangerous. When he is taken back to the squadron again he accepts the "odious" deal, not because he wants to but because, with all hope gone, there seems to be no point in not doing so. But catch-22 is not so simple. By accepting the deal he betrays his dead friends who have fallen victim to catch-22 and accepts death himself. In what is symbolic of his betrayal of his life-centered stance, Natel's Whore's knife finds its mark as soon as he leaves the colonel's office.

In the hospital, in a drugged state of semi-consciousness, he is visited by a shadowy figure (an echo of Milo at the funeral) who informs him that "We've got your pal, buddy, we've got your pal." When he awakens he finds that even the deal has been perverted; officially Natel's Whore is being described as a Nazi assassin and he is being credited with having saved Colonel Cathcart's life. He realizes that they do have all his pals--even Hungry Joe has been found dead in his sleep--and he resolves to reject the deal. He is left with the prospect

of flying more missions (and almost certain death) or going to prison. Still caught in this dilemma he falls asleep and again the shadowy figure appears to repeat his message.. This totally unnerves Yossarian and he breaks out in a cold sweat. The cold reminds him of Snowden and we are finally given the full details of the death of the young gunner. All the time Snowden lay dying he had complained of the cold. Since Yossarian has no way of easing his pain, all he can do is mutter "There, there," over and over again in an anguished cry of resignation which echoes Lear's inarticulate "Never, Never, Never, Never, Never."

It is while Yossarian is in this state of mind that the chaplain brings news of Orr's successful escape to Sweden. Now Yossarian's hope is restored and he resolves to follow Orr's example. He realizes now why Orr spoke in riddles and wore a mask of obliquity. Orr's message is simple: in an Absurd world which perverts every well-intentioned action and every effort to take a stand, the first duty is to save oneself. This perhaps is not very heroic in the usual sense of the word but Yossarian has long ago decided that it makes more sense to be a live coward than a dead hero. At this point he regains sight of this principle. He will stop in Rome and try to help the Kid Sister but he will not force the issue; he will

act toward people as Orr acted toward him. Like Simon, in Golding's Lord of the Flies, he now knows the truth but, unlike Simon and unlike Christ, Yossarian will not attempt to convince the world of his discovery. Like Orr he will attempt to save himself and in so doing will point the way for others and leave it to them to follow his example. Like Camus's rebel he says "yes" to life and, according to his own logic, if everybody acted that way Yossarian would be a fool to act any other.

CHAPTER IV

EPILOGUE AS PROLOGUE

John Aldridge, in the course of a comment on the analysis of recent American fiction, offers the following words of caution on the subject:

A series of violent revolutions have overthrown all our old comfortable assumptions about the nature of literature and society, and we have entered on a bewildering new era in which to talk about the literary situation or recent trends in the novel or any of the old capsule subjects seems as formidable and dangerous as an attempt to describe the new mathematics or to summarize the politics of the New Left.¹

Such a warning, from a critic of no mean stature, is not to be passed over lightly. Nevertheless, if we are to make any attempt to grant relevance to the offerings of our best contemporary novelists we must be prepared to take this apparently dangerous step.

Such a step, however, must become more than an exercise in academic bravado. The relationships between literature and society, between literature and the life we all live, which Aldridge mentions must not be missed. There is nothing very startling in this; it is simply that

¹"Contemporary Fiction and Mass Culture," New Orleans Review (Fall, 1968), p. 4.

the quality of urgency which characterizes our times--a quality which has not passed unobserved by our best novelists--makes the realization of the point all the more vital. In a comment on alienation and disaffiliation in contemporary literature, Richard Barksdale uses the classic study of American literature by D.H. Lawrence to illustrate this point.

Perhaps, D.H. Lawrence in his Studies in Classic American Literature provides a fitting summary of these [alienation and disaffiliation] when he writes: "America hurts, because it has a powerful disintegrative influence." Lawrence saw, underneath the bravado of creed and doctrine, the surging lava of disillusionment, disaffection, and anxiety tinged with helplessness and semi-hysteria.²

This is not a uniquely American condition, as I have demonstrated above by reference to the European Existential novel and the Drama of the Absurd. Nevertheless, it has qualities which are uniquely American; and qualities which are uniquely dangerous.

However, as Ihab Hassan has said, "Danger, which has made us tightrope walkers to the future, may also make clowns of us all. Yet clowns can have skill and vision too. They can write horror and slapstick and make men laugh in order to live. This is something that

²"Alienation and the Anti-Hero in Recent American Fiction," CLA Journal (September, 1966), pp. 4-5.

novelists know well, although their critics do not always say so."³ The refusal of the critics to grant Joseph Heller this right to seek sanity in madness has been a central argument of this study. The reason behind this refusal lies in two opposing life views--two views of what constitutes reality--one view being that of Heller, and a host of contemporary novelists, dramatists and poets, the other being that of many popular, and some academic, critics.

Heller's view, the view which guides Yossarian's stance in Catch-22, is summarized by Martin Esslin in a comment on Absurd drama. "The means by which the dramatists of the Absurd express their critique...of our disintegrating society are based on suddenly confronting their audiences with a grotesquely heightened and distorted picture of a world that has gone mad."⁴ Novelists like Conrad, Mann, Lawrence, Proust, Kafka, Faulkner, Joyce, Bellow, Malamud, Bourjaily, and Heller have, to a greater or lesser degree, employed similar techniques to reach virtually the same conclusion.

"Paradoxically, however, most people live as though stability were not only possible but already present.

³"Laughter in the Dark: The New Voice in American Fiction," American Scholar (Autumn, 1964), p. 636.

⁴The Theatre of the Absurd (1969), p. 360.

Their public lives, as well as their private..., are based on ambitions, goals, continuity."⁵ Heller's hostile critics fit squarely into this group. This seems to suggest a sharp contradiction between the way most people view their life and their world and the way this life and world are reflected by our major novelists. Among popular critics the consensus seems to be that the best novels being written today have nothing to do with reality. Such an attitude explains why minor novelists who continue to have books on the best seller lists are those who "continue in the Victorian main stream and reflect a relatively stable world."⁶ Unfortunately, such a world is but the reflection of a dream which even then was only a dream and in our age has become a nightmare.

Philip Roth, in an essay read at Stanford University before a symposium on "Writers in America Today," recounts a strange and savage story of the rape and murder of two Chicago high school girls by a Skid Row bum who, thanks to a campaign by the media, received only success and riches for himself, his mother and the mother of the victims. The story is strange because it actually

⁵Frederick R. Karl, "Pursuit of the Real," Nation (April 21, 1962), p. 345.

⁶Ibid.

happened. Roth continues:

And what is the moral of so long a story? Simply this: that the American writer in the middle of the 20th century has his hands full in trying to understand, and then describe, and then make credible much of the American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's over meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist. Who, for example, could have invented Charles Van Doren? Roy Cohn and David Schine? Sherman Adams and Bernard Goldfine? Dwight David Eisenhower?

It is the vision of such a reality which Heller proclaims in Catch-22 and it is because he proclaims such a vision that he turns toward the absurd in both form and content. This is not, as Brian Way points out, simply a case of literature "catching up with sociology." Instead, it is the espousal of a medium "whose vision and logic are more in harmony with what he sees around him than naturalism would be."⁸ "Naturalism," apparently, is still the first love of the popular critics. Unfortunately, it is the natural, the actual, which is incredible. This is what they refuse to admit. This is what David Littlejohn means when he writes:

⁷"Writing American Fiction," Commentary (March, 1961), p. 224.

⁸"Formal Experiment and Social Discontent: Joseph Heller's Catch-22," Journal of American Studies, 2:2 (October, 1968), p. 257.

Were one to base the entire case for anti-realism on a single novel, he could do no better than choose Joseph Heller's Catch-22....Heller's fantasy is nowhere so extreme as that of the three novelists preceding [Beckett, Borges, Hawkes]. It is, in fact, his very closeness to the truth that makes his extravagant novel at once so ludicrous, so painful, and so important. Heller's method is one of a grotesque and elaborate comic exaggeration of a "reality" bitterly tragic; but one forgets, one almost refuses to admit that any "exaggeration," any absurdity or anti-realism is being used, so undeniably just is the total effect.⁹

Such a total effect has proved to be too much for some critics to comprehend, and for many to admit; by refusing to admit it, they fail to see its validity. Norman Mailer has stated that "if a writer is really good enough and bold enough he will, by the logic of society, write himself out onto a limb which the world will saw off."¹⁰ But the critics, who are so busy sawing, may find themselves in the position of the hapless villain of the animated cartoon. The limb may remain suspended while the tree and the critics come crashing to the ground.

⁹"The Anti-Realists," Daedalus (Spring, 1963), p. 258.

¹⁰"The Big Bite," Esquire (June, 1963), p. 29.

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E. The Brandeis Collection

The following items are on file in the Brandeis University Library at Waltham, Massachusetts. This is an extensive collection which contains, among other items, more than thirty unpublished short stories. Only those items which have a direct bearing on the thesis are listed here.

1. Joseph Heller: Unpublished Manuscripts

"Chart used to outline characters and events in the novel chronologically, prepared before the novel was written."

"A detailed, synthesized analysis of the published work Catch-22, in which the pages of the novel are presented in order and the actions they contain synopsized." 151 pages.

"A chronology of events by separate characters, in which pages for each of the 33 (major) characters in the novel contain lists of all that happens to each character that I deemed important." 45 pages.

"A step by step chronology of each of the three bombing missions on which just about the entire novel is constructed, with the relating of each of the steps to the actions of the characters affected." 10 pages.

ii. Letters Relating to Foreign Editions of Catch-22

England	Eighteen Letters
Italy	Twenty-eight Letters
France	Nineteen Letters
Germany	Four Letters
Czechoslovakia	Eleven Letters
Finland	One Letter
Rumania	One Letter.

iii. Letters From and To Famous People.

Five (5) from Nelson Algren

Three (3) from Art Buchwald

One (1) from Simone de Beauvoir

One (1) from Kenneth Tynan

One (1) from Thomas Pynchon

One (1) from Evelyn Waugh

Two (2) from John Steinbeck

One (1) from Heller to Steinbeck

One (1) from Philip Toynbee

One (1) from Heller to Toynbee

One (1) from Bertrand Russell

One (1) from Russell's secretary, Ralph Shoenman

Two (2) from Heller to each of them

Two (2) from James Jones

Two (2) from Heller to Jones

One (1) from Howard Fast

One (1) from Heller to Fast

Four (4) from Cleanth Brooks
Two (2) from Heller to Brooks

One (1) from Bennett Cerf

One (1) from Stanley Kubrick

One (1) from Kirk Douglas

Twenty-three (23) between Heller and Tony Curtis

One (1) from Bruce Jay Friedman

Two (2) from John Barth

One (1) from Jeremy Lerner

One (1) from Ralph Gleason

One (1) from Heller to Gleason

One (1) from Russell Baker

One (1) from Alexander King

Eight (8) between Heller and Robert O. Shipman and
parties representing each.



